

## DOCTORAL THESIS

**"Oh, Fatina, Fatina! How did they bring my poor puppet to such a state?"**

**a study of emerging political instrumentalization and its interrogation in subversive texts in Italian children's literature published between the beginning of the First World War and the advent of the fascist regime (1914-1921)**

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**“Oh, Fatina, Fatina! How did they bring my poor puppet to  
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Italian children's literature published between the beginning  
of the First World War and the advent of the fascist regime  
(1914-1921)**

by

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## Abstract

My study aims to contribute to the research into the processes of nationalization of childhood and of the appropriation of children's literature as a medium for patriotic propaganda that took place in Western Europe during the first half of the XIX century. In this historical period, in Italy, children progressively acquired an unprecedented role within the social fabric. In particular, the fascist authorities perceived children's education as a privileged vehicle for the diffusion of the party's doctrine and the assertion of its hegemony. Therefore, children became the object of specific educational strategies and policies, aimed at building on their aspirations and needs in order to shape and use them as a means for social control and conditioning.

The foundations of the fascist interpretation of childhood emerged with the advent of the First World War. The Italian government authorities identified the involvement of young people in the war effort and their enthusiastic support as a decisive factor for the achievement of a widespread consensus among the popular masses on the necessity of the conflict. Children's literature published during the Great War and in the first post-war period reflects the emerging practices of children's involvement with the contemporary political agenda, which were going to be later resumed and emphasized by the fascist government. This historical period coincided therefore with the beginning of the incorporation of children and their literature into the mechanism of propaganda; moreover, it witnessed the creation of the nationalist and martial rhetoric that was to be at the heart of the fascist discourse. During this historical phase, many books and magazines for children addressed the current conflict, thus creating a subgenre of children's literature on war largely aligned with the predominant patriotic ideology. The

emergence of children's texts supporting the war cause coexisted, however, with the presence of other genres, namely the "twilight" movement and the comical and satirical current, which enriched the panorama of contemporary children's literature with creative and subversive inventions.

By engaging in an extensive analysis of children's books published in this period, I aim to demonstrate how they convey cultural values and images that represent an important foundation for the beginning of the politicization of children and the incorporation of their reading matter in the mechanism of propaganda during the fascist era, and to uncover and draw critical attention to the existence and potential of these works of literature that demonstrate the willingness and commitment of many children's authors and editors to resist the authoritarian project to control the child imaginary.

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## Introduction

### *Research focus*

In this study, I analyse the development of Italian children's culture and literature in the period beginning with the advent of the Great War in 1914 to the first election of fascist deputies in the Parliament in 1921. The association between childhood and the patriotic and martial ideology to be consolidated by fascism emerged in this historical phase. In fact, with the advent of the First World War Italian government authorities identified the involvement of young people in the war effort and their enthusiastic support as a decisive factor for the achievement of a widespread consensus among the popular masses on the necessity of the conflict. After the end of the conflict, the celebration of events and sacrifices related to the war was to become one of the pillars of fascist mythology and propaganda directed to the young generations.

Children's literature published during the Great War and in the first post-war period reflected the emerging practices of children's involvement with the contemporary political agenda, which were going to be later resumed and emphasized by the fascist government. However, the emerging instrumentalization of children's literature proceeded in parallel with the development of subversive children's texts, including texts which caricatured and parodied the war and the interventionist clichés, as well as novels which questioned contemporary political events and social conventions through the use of nonsense and humour.



My study aims to analyse the parallel development of these two genres in the years leading to the establishment of the fascist government in order to contribute to the research on the evolution of the role assigned to childhood and its literature in Italy in the twentieth century. Through my research project, I wish to make a contribution to the knowledge and appreciation of the body of work of children's literature written and published during the decade leading to the establishment of the fascist hegemony in Italy. A particular objective of this research is to uncover and to draw critical attention to the existence and potential of those works of literature that demonstrate the willingness and commitment of many children's authors and editors to resist the authoritarian project to control and manipulate the child imaginary. I hope that my research will highlight the ways in which this body of work attempted to challenge the program of homogenization and militarization of children's identities in Italy in the period in question. I aim to analyse how these subversive texts promoted instead the understanding of childhood as an unconventional, skeptical and creative phase, and of children's literature as connected with its critical social role and its capacity to contest values and models imposed by society.

Moreover, I intend to explore the relationship between children's literature published between 1914 and 1921, and the body of work published for children during the Fascist 'Ventennio' (1922-1945), in particular in terms of how topics and genres that emerged in children's literature during the Great War were echoed and developed in fascist children's book during the phase of establishment of the party.

Since taking control of the Italian government in 1922, the fascist authorities pursued a relentless process of appropriation of children's literary. By controlling and

manipulating their reading material, the regime planned to create a sort of new mentality among the young generations, consisting of fervent patriotisms, magniloquent rhetoric, and the exaltation of pseudo-myths and war rituals. Through my study, I intend to research how the topics and genres of mainstream children's literature published during the Great War and the immediate post-war period laid the foundations for the fascist authors' project of appropriation of children's literature. I also aim to uncover how the subjects and narrative strategies that I discuss in this thesis as typical of the subversive literature evolved during the fascist government into a fundamental niche of resistance against the fascistization of children's literature. The effort to build a childhood culture homogenous with the fascist discourse collided, in fact, with the non-compliance and resistance of many contemporary children's authors and editors, who were able to create spaces for autonomy and implicit criticism. Through my study, I aim to uncover and analyse how both fascist literature and subversive literature published during the Ventennio were influenced in terms of themes, genres and narrative styles, by children's literature published during the First World War and its immediate aftermath.

### *Context*

Children's literature published between the outbreak of the First World War and the onset of the fascist regime has received limited attention from Italian literary critics until recently. This body of research is however in rapid growth, along with the study of fascist children's literature. Overviews of works and authors operating during this historical phase appear in the general studies of A. Faeti (*Letteratura per l'Infanzia*, 1971; *Guardare le Figure*, 1972), P. Boero and C. De Luca (*La Letteratura per*

*l'Infanzia*, 1995), and W. Fochesato (*Raccontare la Guerra*, 2011). Their research goes beyond the mere descriptivism and the strictly pedagogic approach that had characterized previous work on the subject: instead, they adopt interpretative models and the instruments of investigation characteristic of historical and literary criticism, in order to gain a more informed appreciation of the literary production related to this phase of Italian history.

An important contribution specifically focused on the subject of the development of Italian children's literature between the beginning of the First World War and the end of the fascist regime is offered by the study of M. Colin (*Les Enfants de Mussolini. Littérature, Livres, Lecture d'Enfance et de Jeunesse sous le Fascisme*, 2010), a comprehensive research which relates children's literature to contemporary culture and to the history of education. Colin's study illustrates the deterministic relation between political and social events and literary production, in order to measure the extent to which Italian political authorities relied on textual and iconographic forms to model the children's consciences and the collective imaginary.

Further contributions to the research on the identity of children's literature during the Great War and the fascist era have been made by a variety of recent publications. The study of S. Fava (*Percorsi Critici di Letteratura per l'Infanzia tra le due Guerre*, 2004) is structured as an investigation of journals of literary criticism published in the interwar period and of their reviews of works for children. A questioning of the exploitation of children's literature to political ends, and in particular through its control of children's publishing houses, is the subject of the study of A. Scotto di Luzio (*L'Appropriazione*

*Imperfetta*, 1996). More recently, a study by Lyndsay Meyers (*Making the Italians. Poetics and Politics of Italian Children's Fantasy*, 2012) offered important insights into the use of fantasy as subversive genre throughout the history of Italian children's literature. Additionally, the papers by Jessica D'Eath (*'A noi!': the emergence of the gallant Fascist in Italian children's literature of the inter-war period*, 2014), Francesca Orestano (*On the Italian Front: Salvator Gotta's Piccolo Alpino*, 2015) and Caterina Sinibaldi (*Pinocchio, a Political Puppet: the Fascist Adventures of Collodi's Novel*, 2011) offer excellent examples of close readings of children's novels about the war written during the fascist regime. A very recent publication by Maria Truglio (*Italian Children's Literature and National Identity. Childhood, Melancholy, Modernity*, 2018), explore the relationship between Italian children's literature and national identity by looking at the parallelism between the development of Italy as a unified nation and of children's literature between the Risorgimento and the onset of the First World War,

Most Italian children's literature scholars tend to present the Great War and the immediate after-war years as a phase of decline from the flourishing of literary activity for the young which had characterized the previous half century. In particular, they emphasize how, because of the pressure to conform to the official discourse which followed the government's decision to enter the Great War, the capacity of Italian authors for creation and innovation was progressively extinguished.

This decline is undeniable. However, the same historical period witnessed the publication of works for children that expressed criticism and skepticism towards the martial and nationalistic ideology. The presence and the role of this subversive subgenre is mentioned in the study of Boero and De Luca, but is otherwise largely ignored by

literary criticism. The purpose of my research is to apply perspectives derived from Historicist criticism and the tools of literary analysis to offer original readings and to extend an understanding and appreciation of this subgenre. Through the adoption of this combined critical approach, my study aims at recovering and investigating texts and authors whose literary value and capacity for cultural criticism have been neglected. Previous criticism has read them out of the social context which produced them, which led to a devaluation of their value as literary products and to a disregard of their subversive functions.

My study aims to address these misconceptions. In particular, I aim to demonstrate how the focus texts of my analysis of subversive children's literature were actively involved in challenging the current official discourse, thus providing a critique of contemporary culture.

For example, my reading of *Il Cuore di Pinocchio* (*The Heart of Pinocchio*), written by Collodi Nipote in 1917, highlights how the discussion of the mutilation of the child soldier protagonist has important subversive qualities. To a modern reader, Collodi Nipote's irreverent and satirical description of Pinocchio's mutilations can appear inappropriate for a child audience or as a mere manifestation of the author's gusto for the grotesque. However, my analysis of contemporary magazines reveals how Collodi Nipote was criticizing a myth of current propaganda which interpreted soldiers' mutilations as sacred wounds. Through his desecrating description of Pinocchio's mutilations, the author expresses his skepticism towards the official discourse on soldiers' experience of the conflict: he contests their image as fearless heroes by exposing their vulnerability and suffering. The contextualized approach therefore

appears to be appropriate in order to elucidate significant links between social context and literary expression, and to explore strategies through which subversive authors managed to create spaces for autonomy and implicit criticism.

### *Methodology*

I began my research by investigating the evolution of the interpretation of the role of childhood in contemporary culture. The analysis of historical and sociological studies, for example G. Mosse's *Masses and Men* (1975) and J. Joll and G. Martel's *The Origins of the First World War* (1984), led me to gain an understanding of the impact of the Great War in terms of social and cultural transformations in Italy, and in particular its consequences for the relationship between power authorities and the people. Subsequently, I have focused my research on the mobilization of childhood as an integral part of the involvement of the civil population in the war effort and in the establishment of nationalistic dynamics. I was able to research the phenomenon of children's mobilization during the war in both Italian and French sources, such as A. Fava's *All'Origine di Nuove Immagini dell'Infanzia: gli Anni della Grande Guerra* (1993) and Manon Pignot's *Allons Enfants de la Patrie. Generation Grande Guerre* (2012). This comparative research made me aware of similarities and differences between these two cultures with regards to how this phenomenon originated and developed, and in particular of the peculiarities of contemporary Italian society.

The second phase of my research was focused on the analysis of the involvement of contemporary social institutions and popular media in the nationalization of childhood,

and in particular the role of children's literature in this process. My analysis involved the parallel reading of histories of Italian children's literature (such as the studies of Boero and De Luca and Faeti, but also Mariella Colin's 2010 *Les Enfants de Mussolini* and Walter Fochesato's 2011 *Raccontare la Guerra*), primary literary sources in the form of novels (eg Olga Visentini's 1916 *Primavere Italiane*), stories (eg Marga's 1917 *I Ragazzi e la Guerra*) and comics (eg Attilio Mussino's *Schizzo* published in *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* in 1915) published in the period in focus, and contemporary non-literary material, such as memoirs (eg Ivano Urli's 2003 *Bambini nella Grande Guerra*), autobiographies (eg Giuseppe Boschetti's *La Grande Guerra negli Occhi di un Bambino*) and periodical articles (eg Vamba's 1917 *Occhi e Nas* published in 1917 in *La Lettura*). This study enabled me to identify some of the most significant recurring features of literary products addressed to children published between 1914 and 1921, and their relationship with the contemporary political and cultural environment. As a result of this investigation, I was able to describe and discuss the contribution of literature to the process of deviation from the conception of children as innocent victims to be protected from the trauma and tragedy of the war, towards their role as witnesses and active protagonists of civilians' involvement in war dynamics, up to their image as miniature soldiers with heroic aspirations.

The third phase of my research was dedicated to an analysis of the extent to which children's authors managed to defend spaces for questioning and subverting the contemporary predominant ideology. I have identified the presence of two main literary currents through which these antiestablishment positions were expressed: the "twilight" movement and the satirical and comical current. Through the analysis of the biographies

and the body of work of two authors representing those literary currents, namely Arpalice Cuman Pertile (*Ninetta e Tirintin* 1918, *Fra Canti, Balli, Fiori e Ghirlandelle* 1921, *Indovina! Grillo!* 1923) and Collodi Nipote ( *Le Avventure di Chifellino* 1901, *Sussi e Biribissi* 1902, *Il Cuore di Pinocchio* 1917), I have discussed the strategies chosen to resist political exploitation in children's literature and challenge the image of childhood presented by the dominant culture.

The main issue raised by the research for my first two chapters was the overwhelming wealth of primary material available and its relative disorganization. In order to access primary sources, I have visited two collections of Italian children's literature, the Barolo Foundation and the Colonnetti Foundation, both located in Turin. These collections focus specifically on children's novels, periodicals and scholastic para-literature published in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. However, only a part of the available material is catalogued. Nevertheless, the librarians allowed me to return repeatedly to search the collections and helped me to identify some valuable sources. I have also visited the "Carlo Collodi" foundation in Pescia (Pistoia): although this collection is particularly devoted to the life and work of the author of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, it also includes a large selection of literary material published between the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Thus, I was able to read more than forty novels and story collections published between 1914 and 1921, as well as complete volumes of the most widely distributed contemporary children's magazines, scholastic texts and non-fiction children's books and pamphlets about the war. I have also engaged extensively with children's books and magazines published in the following two decades, in order to be able to understand the



influence of my focus texts on the development of children's literature during the fascist dictatorship.

Following my research, I have created a database of children's novels and short story collections published during the Great War and its immediate aftermath, which I have attached as an appendix to this study and shared online as a public resource ([www.tinyurl.com/gaudino-annotated-bib](http://www.tinyurl.com/gaudino-annotated-bib)). In creating this database, my aim is to give an indication of the reading material that I have located and how representative this material is of the examples I discuss through this thesis. Moreover, I hope that by sharing publically this resource and assigning keywords to each entry, I can contribute to scholar research on the history of Italian children's literature.

The table below illustrates how much material I located, how representative of the material my examples are, and what proportion of texts fall into the categories that I have established in my studies.

Table 1. List of focused texts and their assigned category

Title	Mainstream children's literature about the Great War			Subversive children's literature about the Great War	
	Ludic children's literature	Verist children's literature	Adventure children's literature	Twilight children's literature	Comical and satirical children's literature
Pentolino e la Grrrande Guerra (V. Bravetta)	X				
Tranquillino... Dopo La Guerra Vuol Creare Il Mondo Nuovo (V. Bravetta)			X		
Parla il chiodo! Scherzo d'attualita' Per Fanciulli (C.	X	X			

Biscaretti)					
Storielle Di Lucciole E Di Stelle (G. Bistolfi)				X	
L'Avventurissima E Altre Storie Quasi Straordinarie Per Fanciulli (G. Bistolfi)				X	
Pinocchietto Contro l'Austria (B. Bruni)			X		
: Il Cuore Di Pinocchio. Nuove Avventure Del Celebre Burattino (Collodi Nipote)					X
Ninetta E Tirintin (A. Cuman Pertile)				X	
: Fra Canti, Balli, Fiori E Ghirlandelle (A. Cuman Pertile)				X	
Da Ragazzi A Uomini (C. Del Soldato)	X		X		
Pippetto Vuole Andare Alla Guerra (Donna Paola)			X		
La Gran Fiamma (G. Fabiani)		X	X		
Il Castello Delle Carte (G. Fanciulli)				X	
Sussurri (U. Ghiron)				X	
ABCdario Di Guerra (Golia)	X				
Le Fiabe In Versi (A. Guglielminetti)				X	
Bimbi Di Trieste. Scene Dal Vero (Haydee)		X			
I Ragazzi E La Guerra (Marga)		X	X		
Cenerella (M. Messina)		X	X		
Tre Favole Belle (F. Pastonchi)			X		
Fratello. Libro Per La Giovinezza (V. Podrecca)			X		
Il Piu' Felice Bambino Del Mondo (C. Prosperi)				X	

L'Aereo Di Girandolino (A. Rossato)			X		
Viperetta (A. Rubino)					X
Tic E Tac, Ovverossia L'Orologio Di Pamplona (A. Rubino)					X
Storia Degli Austriaci Senza Rancio E di Ventidue Asinelli Prigionieri (F. Saponi)	X				
I Cavoli A Merenda (Sto)					X
Storie Di Cantastorie (Sto)					X
La Ghirlandetta. Storie di Soldati (Teresah)		X	X		
Piccoli Eroi Della Grande Guerra (Teresah)		X	X		
La Regina Degli Usignoli. Storia Di Una Bambina Belga (Teresah)				X	
Il Romanzo Di Pasqualino (Teresah)	X	X			
Il caporale di quindici anni. Gesta e avventure di un ragazzo nella Guerra contro l'Austria (A. Tortoreto)			X		
I Bimbi D'Italia Si Chiaman Balilla. I Ragazzi Italiani Nel Risorgimento Nazionale (Vamba)			X		
Primavera Italica (O. Visentini)		X	X		
: La Zingarella E La Principessa (O. Visentini)		X			
Ciuffettino Alla Guerra (Yambo)			X		
Gorizia Fiammeggiante. Il Figlio Del Tricolore (Yambo)			X		

It is unfortunately beyond the means of this study to estimate the actual reach or popularity of the texts analysed for this research. A majority of the books that I have read were given as prizes during school assemblies, or circulated in school and public libraries. However, close analysis of the imagery, tone and language of many of my focus texts suggest that many children's author working during the Great War years had a double audience in mind, of children and parents. This is the case, for example, in Golia's *ABCDario di Guerra*, which used specific reference to war weapons and sanguinary episodes which could not be expected to be part of the cultural capital of the young children to which the illustrated book seems otherwise directed to (figure 4). Even more explicitly, Theresa's *Piccoli Eroi della Grande Guerra* contains straightforward appeal to mothers at the end of every short story.

### *Organization*

My thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter focuses on a discussion of the evolution of the interpretation of the value and role of childhood in contemporary culture. I start by illustrating the impact of the Great War in terms of social and cultural transformations in Italy, in particular its consequences for the relationship between power authorities and the popular masses. This is followed by an analysis of the phenomenon of the mobilization of childhood as an integral part of the process of involvement of the civil population in the war effort, and in the establishment of nationalistic dynamics. I then illustrate how contemporary social institutions and popular media were involved in the politics of the process of the nationalization of childhood.

In the second chapter, I analyse some of the most significant recurring features of children's books written and published during the historical period in focus, with the aim of understanding the specific role of children's literature in the construction and representation of contemporary images of childhood. In particular, I discuss the contribution of literature to the process of deviation from the conception of the child as an innocent victim to be protected from the trauma and tragedy of the war, towards a role as witness and active protagonist in civil engagement and resistance, and finally to a portrait of the child as miniature soldier with heroic aspirations. My objective is to analyse themes and models of this trajectory in order to describe the double role of children's literature as both witness and maker of children's identities in this exceptional historic phase.

The third chapter focuses on the extent to which contemporary children's authors and editors managed to express their position of resistance against the nationalistic appropriation of children's literature. The emergence of children's texts supporting the war cause coexisted with the presence of other genres, namely the "twilight" movement and the comical and satirical current, which enriched the panorama of contemporary children's literature with creative and subversive inventions. Through the analysis of the biographies and literary production of two authors I have identified as representative of resistance, I discuss literary themes and strategies chosen to present images of childhood alternatives to those proposed by the dominant ideology

Chapter One: The evolution of the interpretation of childhood during the First World War and the first post-war period, and its influence on the development of Italian children's literature

*The impact of the First World War in terms of social and cultural transformations in Italy*

The catastrophe of the Great War marked a watershed in both European and Italian history and culture: it sealed the final decline of late nineteenth century idealist and liberal values and mentality, and it inaugurated a new modern century, characterized by radical transformations in terms of relations between State and society, demographic and productive growth, technological innovations and scientific discoveries.

The radical modernizing appeal of the Great War originated in particular from its totalizing reach and from the involvement required of all the segments of the population (Mosse, 1997). The experience of the conflict assumed extreme and unforeseeable characteristics in terms of its intensity, duration, geographic and economic scale, and its traumatizing impact. All people, soldiers and civilians, who took part in the war in any capacity were afterwards deeply devastated by that experience (Gibelli, 2007). The nature of the event in itself required an unprecedented engagement on the part of the involved nations. This could no longer be limited to the deployment of efficient military technologies and political strategies, but also had to be built on organizational and coercive systems put in place by the militarized State in order to mobilize the population in its entirety (Mosse, 1997). In fact, because of the prolonged effort required by the

conflict, the government authorities could no longer avoid a total mobilization of the masses. This process required the institution of a programmed operation of mass pedagogy and the achievement of a widespread consensus on an unprecedented scale. Participation in the war and the desired victory demanded the employment of every material and moral resource, on both the war and the home fronts (Audouin-Rouzeau, 2002). In the context of my research project, the impact of the Great War on the civilian population, whose involvement in the conflict assumed unimaginable and radical proportions, both from a pragmatic and from an ideological point of view, is particularly relevant.

*Consequences of the Great War on the relationship between political authorities and the popular masses*

The events of the First World War marked a crucial shift in the relation between State organs and civilian masses and led to a redefinition of the role of the individual in society. The conflict produced a new capacity for the psychological mobilization and social control of popular masses since the traditional social separation between the public and the private spheres, in particular between the family and community dimension on one hand and the body politic on the other, was violated. This resulted in a profound remodeling of the social fabric (Mosse, 1997).

In Italy, the Great War determined an acceleration of the process of institutionalized socialization and a radical nationalistic accentuation of the formative models. Moreover, it represented an opportunity for experimentation with mass pedagogy, which laid the

foundations for the future model of totalitarian government realized by the fascist party (Giuntella, 1993). In fact, the process of involvement and nationalization of the civil masses had been dictated since the dawn of the conflict by an aggressive and paternalist discourse, which amplified the pedagogic functions of the State and was based on a consideration of the popular masses as an infantile and immature subject. Italian people were considered as a body to educate, conquer and persuade, and eventually manipulate and deceive, in order to transform them from a weak point to a factor of strength for the nation at war (Fava, 1993).

The mythical objective of “making the Italians”, which had emerged during the movements that led to the unity of Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century and which had as its purpose the creation of an Italian people with a common mentality and values, reacquired momentum. It assumed a modern significance in the new political and cultural context, related to the necessity to mould a united nation, able to withstand the atrocities of the war with boldness and without wavering (Isnenghi, 2002).

*The nationalization of childhood as integral to the involvement of the civil population in the dynamics of war*

A direct consequence of the new strategies for conditioning and remodeling individual and collective identities was the setting in motion of the phenomenon of the induction of children into nationalistic practices. Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, in Italy, the realm of childhood had generally remained underground and opaque, largely ignored other than as a passive object of educative, disciplinary and charitable



institutions, which mostly aimed at social control and public order. However, with the dawn of the new century, children had begun to attract more attention as subjects with a specific identity and a potentially active role in society (Giuntella, 1993). The First World War marked a crucial passage in this process, adding unforeseen dimensions and characteristics, and assigning to the world of childhood an unprecedented visibility and an outstanding social role.

The process of the emergence of childhood from its public consideration as a social problem to its position of preeminence in the social and political context originated in fact from welfare concerns related to wartime mobilization. The absence of fathers and older brothers called to arms, as well as the new role of mothers as house-holders, often compelled to work outside the house to support their families and to contribute to the war effort, resulted in a remodeling of the traditional family unit and in an exposition of children's vulnerability and impotence. The increasing number of orphans and evacuees from the battle territories contributed to this process (Gibelli, 2005). Childhood presented itself to the eyes of the institutions and of the entire society as a new reality, both from qualitative and quantitative points of view: it rapidly became the object of assistance and of an agenda of patriotic acculturation, which in the context of war mobilization assumed a strategic value in the pursuit of national moral cohesion and solidarity (Fava, 1993). Hence, the war positioned children at the heart of the process of nationalistic education, certifying their emergent role as active instruments in the organization of the unanimous consensus on the necessity and value of the current war among the popular masses.

The process of mobilization of childhood in Italy during the First World War mirrored the methods adopted in the rest of Occidental Europe. Patriotic indoctrination and education about the war drew on similar instruments and strategies, in particular with regard to iconographic and literary production. The discourse aimed at children in the main European countries involved in the conflict appears in fact to share many elements such as heroism myths, stereotypes of the enemy, and the interweaving of encyclopedic factual knowledge and childish curiosity (Audouin-Rouzeau, 1993).

The peculiarity of Italy in the context of the general mobilization of childhood derived from the necessity to fill a deficiency of cultural identity among the population, which had its roots in the problematic and delayed process of geographic and political national unification. Besides, in most European countries participation in the war had been presented as a compelling and defensive choice, and had been supported by a widespread popular consensus. Instead, the choice of the Italian government to take part in the conflict had been tormented and delayed, and it had raised discontent and bitter criticism among a large portion of the population. The pedagogic accentuation of the political and educative models thus bore the additional task of supporting the interventionist discourse and legitimating the war in the eyes of the Italian people, in order to create widespread and unanimous support.

The idea of the necessity to create a sentiment of common identity and mentality among Italian people through the integration of patriotic elements in children's formative pathways, which had its roots in the previous century, assumed thus a present day value and the characteristics of precocious para-politic and para-military engagement (Fava, 1993). The patriotic and interventionist agenda promoted a new image of the child as the

“sentinella della patria” (“sentinel of the fatherland”), in other words as a model of the national character, an advocate of the values of “Italianness”, and as a witness of the national moral strength in its most intimate and delicate dimensions (Gibelli, 2005).

The new perception and representation of childhood in Italy resulted thus from the conjugation of two main ideological paradigms: the concern for the fate of the new generations and a new awareness of their political role, which merged with the realization by the government authorities of the necessity of ensuring and nourishing the fervent support and involvement of the juvenile masses.

The image of childhood in the cultural context of the First World War was codified and conveyed through a variety of characteristics, costumes and shades, ranging from pietistic and melodramatic instances to the codes of an exalted and heroic patriotism. However, they were all ascribable to the double track of interpretation of children as objects for protection and a guarantee of the radiant future of the nation, and as a privileged means for the correction of the fallacies and degeneration of the Italian people. From the charitable services and educational preoccupations dedicated to children there emerged therefore a renewed militant version of the concept of the fatherland, which laid the foundations for the development of an aggressive pedagogy, legitimated by the interweaving of welfarism, national acculturation and propaganda.

*How children's institutions and popular media were involved in the phenomenon of the nationalization of childhood*

In order to promote the involvement of the youngest generations in the nationalistic discourse and their acceptance of their assigned role as active instruments in the achievement of a mass consensus, the current war had to be explained and made visible and concrete (Gibelli, 2005). Scholastic and educational institutions, children's literature and a variety of forms of iconographic production were involved in the project of the familiarization of the war in children's eyes: they offered a crucial contribution to the promotion of the involvement of children in war mobilization and to the emergent patriotic pedagogy.

Thus, the school curriculum was put into the service of the exaltation of national ideals, through methods such as the reading of heroic episodes reported by the newspapers, the dictation of patriotic texts or the study of the geography of the territories of war. Moreover, children were encouraged by the government institutions to visit injured soldiers in hospitals, to participate in military funerals, and to contribute to the collection of money to support the army (Colin, 2010). The toy market was also involved in nationalization practices, through the production of miniature arms and military equipment aimed at accurately reproducing those used on the war front. For example, in the catalogue of the toy factory "Moncalieri Giuocattoli", published in 1917, there appeared among other toys a tracked cannon, a trench mortar, a Red Cross truck and even a "Serraglio Quadruplice Intesa" ("Menagerie Quadruple Entente"). This last toy offered a stylized and allegoric representation of the main Powers involved in the conflict: it consisted of four little models of wild beasts, whose helmets identified

them as an Austrian lion, a German tiger, a Turkish monkey and a Bulgarian bear, confined in a cage on four wheels. The cage was drawn by a horse ridden by four toy soldiers, which represented the Italian infantryman and his French, English and Russian allies (Figures 1 and 2).

These vehicles of education and information translated the dominant nationalistic discourse in terms comprehensible to children, thus responding to a demand for recapitulation, inquiry and revision. In the didactic simplification and in the effort to reach the maximum effect by touching emotional chords and evoking associations of ideas, the themes and persuasive strategies of nationalist discourse were communicated with particular essentiality and clarity, revealing deep-rooted aspects of the national war culture (Fava, 1993).

Moreover, children were identified and addressed as particularly suitable to receive and propagate spontaneously to the masses the revealed truths of the patriotic agenda. The political authorities soon came to perceive them as instruments of propaganda, potentially able to break the toughest recesses of refractoriness (Pignot, 2004). In fact, the process of nationalization of childhood was based on children's double role as subjects with their own specific identity and as vehicles aimed at conditioning and controlling families and small community circles. On the one hand, children were presented by contemporary popular media as the main receivers of the patriotic formative discourse, which was founded on values such as power, sacrifice and heroism. In contemporary speeches, newspaper articles and advertising, children assumed the traits of witnesses and victims of the impact of the conflict on civilian and family life. They were depicted as helpless abandoned creatures, in need of protection; as the

primary potential target of the cruel enemy; and, as little heroes desperate to join and emulate the soldiers at the front (Fava, 1993). On the other hand, children were identified as spontaneous and enthusiastic models of “Italianness” for older generations. They appeared in fact as the most apt and genuine vehicles through which to propagate what were considered to be the revealed and absolute truths of patriotic discourse. Therefore, they were perceived by the power authorities as preeminent instruments to reach and involve families and small communities, which was a crucial factor for the achievement of a widespread civil engagement in support of warfare (Pignot, 2004).

*The flourishing of children’s literature on war and its reappraisal as a vehicle for ideological transmission and propaganda*

Children’s literature, both in its extended fictional forms and in terms of periodic publications, assumed a new and exceptional role for the diffusion and promotion of war-related role models and myths among children during the First World War. It gradually established itself as one of the most significant repositories of the collective imagination, not just the infantile one, and as a crucial instrument of communication to the popular masses.

The massive and inter-class character of the production and circulation of children’s literature in Italy during and immediately after the Great War was related first of all to reasons of a demographic and cultural nature. In fact, the two decades preceding the war witnessed a rapid growth of the population matched by an economic upturn. The resulting relative stability allowed a prolongation of the period separating childhood

from entry into the adult world, and an increase in number of scholastic institutions and their attendance percentages. The consequent diffusion of literacy practices promoted an increase in the offer of children's literature, both in terms of quantity and variety, and a diminution of the costs, which led to a better ability to reach larger segments of the population. The elitist aspect that had characterized the diffusion of children's literature in Italy up to that point was therefore strongly reappraised; instead, children's books and periodicals became important vehicles for the encouragement of reading and driving forces for the democratization of writing practices (Gibelli, 2005).

This unprecedented flourishing and availability of literature dedicated to children was, however, immediately interpreted by the governmental organs as an opportunity to experiment with mechanisms of social control and conditioning through the manipulation of readers' language and imagery. They interpreted children's literature as a vehicle for the diffusion and promotion of common verbal and iconographic codes that could support and respond to the needs of the consensus organization machine. Because of its potential as a space for experimentation and for contamination between diverse linguistic codes and cultural references, higher and lower genres and tones, caricatural elements and aulic references, the field of children's literature appeared in fact as a privileged opportunity to associate educative objectives with the celebration of the nationalistic cause (Fava, 1993).

Besides, authors and illustrators involved in the production of children's texts during the conflict and in the immediate post-war period were often young artists inclined to create stories and images tailored to the state of mind of contemporary society. In many cases, they had a genuine pedagogical and ideological purpose, being the exponents of an

intellectual middle class driven by patriotic aims (Gibelli, 2005). Thus, the deployment of literary and artistic competences in favor of the nationalistic cause during this historical period does not appear as the result of an imposed or farcical recruitment. Instead, it can be interpreted as an enthusiastic response of children's literature authors and editors to new needs of communication, information and emotional compensation produced by the employment of a wide range of media for wartime propaganda and the large scale of popular involvement required by the First World War.

The flourishing of children's literature in Italy during the war years appears, therefore, to be the result of a multiplicity of factors, the most conspicuous being: new economic possibilities and market choices of the embryonic mass society; authentic pedagogical and patriotic enthusiasms of children's authors and editors; a renewed and diffused awareness of the nature and potential of children's literature as a means for ideological transmission, and, aspirations to control popular language and imaginary characteristic of the nationalistic politics of the war context.



## Chapter Two: Stylization and the presentation of central motifs of nationalistic discourse through different subgenres of children's literature on war

From the beginning of the Great War, themes and messages related to the conflict had a significant influence on the production of literature and the periodic press dedicated to the youngest generations. Most example of contemporary children's literature on war appear as aiming to interpret, support and guide young readers' ways of thinking, their opinions, moods and concerns, in response to the evolution of the contemporary political situation.

The main themes of the propagandistic discourse on war were stylized and translated for children through different styles and linguistic registers. Among the variety of forms found in children's literature on war, it is possible to identify three main subgenres, although many narratives tend to combine elements from more than one. These three subgenres are: the ludic war novel, intended as narratives in which the child protagonists experience or reenact the conflict as a game, through role-play or with their toys; the verist war novel, focused on the role of the involvement and sacrifice of children in the context of the resistance on the home front; and the adventure war novel, based on the character of the boy-soldier personally involved on the warfront. I will proceed by illustrating and discussing each of these subgenres in order to draw a comprehensive overview of the literature on war of that period and of the conveyed image of the child. Moreover, I aim to illustrate how the diffusion of themes and narrative features related

to war propaganda became an important foundation for the progressive politicization of children's literature to be realized during the fascist era.

*The war as a children's game: ludic war literature*

With the term "ludic war literature" I refer to those texts in which war-like conflicts take place on an imaginary level, reenacted by the child protagonists through role-play or with their toy soldiers. This genre of literature on war offered a simplified but effective representation of the current war and was especially common in the first years of the conflict, when enthusiasm and optimism about a rapid and successful conclusion to the war were still widespread among government authorities and the population alike.

Themes and codes of the discourse on war proposed by contemporary official propaganda, such as the stereotyping of the enemy and nationalistic exaltation, are deep-rooted in this subgenre of children's literature. However, they are filtered through simplification and euphemisms. The context is generally joyful and vital, related to recreation and creativity, and the linguistic register tends to be light and farcical, often open to fantastic and fairy-tale elements. Fear, sorrow and losses are minimized and almost non-existent. The generally moderate and playful tones become sharper and more explicit in reference to the supposed stupidity and cruelty of the enemy and to the bravery and sagacity of the Italian people. The enemy is consistently presented as idiotic, awkward and disagreeable, while the Italian soldier is portrayed as agile and clever, a natural winner.

The novel in verse *Pentolino e la Grrrande Guerra* [Pentolino and the Grrreat War], written by Vittorio Emanuele Bravetta in 1915 and illustrated by Golia [Eugenio Colmo] is a good example of ludic war literature. Bravetta was a prolific writer and journalist. During the Great War, he supported the nationalist cause; later, he embraced the fascist ideology and became involved with the establishment of the educational policies of the fascist government. In *Pentolino e la Grrrande Guerra*, he uses light and playful language and tones, which appear far from the racist and patriotic registers which will characterize his later production. However, the subject matter of this short novel is coherent with his martial poetics and his rhetoric of vocation. Similarly, the illustrations by Golia, a popular contemporary caricaturist, appear distant from the aggressive traits characteristic of his production for adults. However, their caricatural nature embeds frequent allusions to contemporary political events.

The protagonist, Pentolino, is a child who, together with his friends Rataplan the Frenchman, Bulldog the Englishman and Balaboff the Russian, plays war games against German and Turkish foes, called Fritz and Mammaluch. At the climax of the novel, after a series of reciprocal teasing jokes, Pentolino falls into a trap set by his enemies. His toy soldiers then magically come to life, becoming an army of Italian “bersaglieri” and defending him from the enemies Fritz and Mammaluch.

In this novel, the role of the child protagonist appears decisive to determine the fate of the war game. Pentolino’s cleverness, generosity and exceptional bravery make up for his physical inferiority. The child protagonist appears thus as naturally superior to his enemies and destined to overcome them (p.2):

*Il bravo Pentolino e' corto, e' grosso:*

*ha la pancia rotonda, il naso rosso...*

*ma il cuore d'oro, ma il cervello fino*

*gridiamo tutti: "Evviva Pentolino!"*

[Good old Pentolino is short and chubby

He has a round tummy and a red nose

But he also has a kind heart and subtle brains

Let's cheer together: "Hurray for Pentolino!"]<sup>a</sup>

Through Pentolino's vicissitudes, the novel offers a stylized and infantilized representation of the current war. The characterization is polarized and caricatural, aimed at illustrating and highlighting the main characteristics of the European Powers involved in the conflict and at justifying the war's inevitability in order to resist the enemies' ferocity. The portraits of the national types highlight the natural superiority of one front over the other and jeer at the opposing alignments. Golia's iconographic apparatus reinforces the political and satirical aspects of the novel: the cover and the numerous illustrations through the text offer comically stylized portraits of the characters, which are allusive and memorable (Vagliani, 2010) (Figures 3).

The child reader is therefore introduced to the contemporary political situation through playful and jubilant registers, which skirt completely the fearful and tragic aspect of the

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<sup>a</sup> All translations are mine, unless otherwise stated.

conflict. The war is reduced to a new role-play game, in which the enemy's threats are consistently belittled and ridiculed through jokes and snares typical of children's games. For example, one of Pentolino's friends manages to foil their foes' nocturnal ambush by extinguishing their torches with a gigantic sneeze (p.20). Later in the novel, Pentolino wrecks a field gun by throwing his friend Rataplan's pipe inside it, which causes the gun to explode (p.38). In another episode, Pentolino succeeds in escaping his enemies' ambush and in giving them a terrible fright by dressing up in a carved pumpkin (p.56).

*Fa gesti e prende pose cosi' strambe*

*Che i due compagni se la danno a gambe;*

*Lasciando perdipiu' come si narra,*

*Fritz l'elmo e Mammaluch la scimitarra!*

[He makes such weird faces and moves

That the two naughty fellows run away

Even leaving behind, so they say,

Fritz his helmet, and Mammaluch his scimitar!]

This episode illustrates how the intrinsic violent situation of the conflict is reduced by the burlesque atmosphere and playful tones. The defeat of Fritz and Mammaluch, and the abandonment of their symbolic weapons, the helm and the scimitar, is funny and rocambolesque. Moreover, the choice of vocabulary, rhyming metrics and use of present

tense reflect the characteristics of popular comic stripes published on contemporary children's magazines, such as *Il signor Bonaventura* or *Quadrato*. The author is therefore offering references to his young readers' cultural capital in order to help his young readers to understand and make sense of the conflict.

Similarly, playful and farcical tones are common among the pages of the *Corriere dei Piccoli*, one of the most popular contemporary children's magazines. Since the beginning of the conflict, in line with the interventionist orientation of its editor Silvio Spaventa Filippi, the magazine published cartoons, short stories and episodic novels dealing with the war. Many of the magazine's authors and illustrators chose to present it with humour and lightness. The characteristics identified for the ludic war novel were proposed by some of the most successful contemporary children's authors, especially in the form of short stories in verse richly illustrated through a series of vignettes. Examples of this form are the adventures of Schizzo, child protagonist of a series of vignettes published on the first page of the magazine from 1914 to 1916, written and illustrated by Attilio Mussino, a beloved contemporary children's illustrator. Every episode of his story has a repetitive framework: Schizzo falls asleep and dreams of fighting the enemy. His battles, however, are fought with snowballs or with bombs that turn out to be Easter eggs; fairy tale characters and animated toy soldiers sometimes intervene to support the protagonist in his offensives. Every episode ends with the sudden awakening of the protagonist in the security and comfort of his bed.

Narrative elements of ludic war literature are still traceable in novels published during the last two years of the war. However, in this historical phase they often assumed gloomier connotations and were burdened by the ideological conditioning of official

propaganda. This is the case, for example, in the story *Lumachino*, published in the collection *I Ragazzi e la Guerra* [Children and War], written by Marga in 1917 and illustrated by Carlo Chiostri. Marga was the pseudonym of Margherita Fazzini, who was a writer of popular adults' and children's novels and an author of studies on child psychology. Her children's novel and short stories appear as endeavors to reconcile her passion for the patriotic cause with her interest in child psychology. Marga subsequently adhered to the fascist cause and pursued a prolific career as children's author during the regime.

*I Ragazzi e la Guerra* is composed of short stories focused on different aspects of the war as experienced by children on the home front. In *Lumachino*, the child protagonist and his friends reenact through role-play a series of war situations, such as life in the trenches or the attack on the enemy armies as they imagine them. The war games here happen exclusively among children split into rival alignments, and they represent an opportunity for understanding and familiarising young readers with the war. In comparison to *Pentolino*, however, the entertaining and creative elements lose ground in favour of the accurate reproduction of war scenarios and actions, reenacted in all their harshness and crudeness.

- *Ragazzi, giuochiamo?*

- *Volentieri, ma a che cosa?*

- *Che domande, alla guerra! Non e' vero, Lumachino?*- chiede Carletto.

- *Sì, sì, bene!* - *E Lumachino salta dalla gioia battendo le manine paffute; ma i piu' grandicelli non sono dello stesso parere.*

- *Senti, Carletto, alla guerra abbiamo giuocato tutto il giorno ieri, e ieri l'altro e quell'altro.*

- *Che importa? La guerra e' un giuoco che non stanca mai!*

- *Lo dici tu. Eppoi comincia a far caldo...*

- *Ma finche' non si e' vinto bisogna continuare, o siamo allo stesso punto di prima, ed era inutile cominciare!*

- *Hai ragione!*

[-Guys, shall we play?-.]

-Sure, but play what?-.]

-Let's play war, of course. Right, Lumachino?-[ asks Carletto.

-Yes, yes, great!-[ and Lumachino jumps happily clapping his hands; but the older children do not agree.

-Listen, Carletto, we have already played war all day yesterday, and the day before, and the one before-.

-Who cares? One can never be tired of playing war!-[.

-If you say so. But it is starting to get hot...-.

-But until we have won, we must continue to fight, or we would be back to where we started, and all our fighting would have been for nothing-.

-You are right!-[



This episode (p.211) illustrates how in this text playing war becomes a way for the child characters to experience personally the challenges facing Italian soldiers, and to profess their patriotic commitment and their value as future combatants. Their role-play is characterized by the repetition of war slogans; those who do not wish to play war are identified as idle and defeatist. Moreover, the most enthusiast war-supporter among the children is Lumachino, who is the youngest and still a toddler. The particular emphasis given to his character echoes the message that the genuine enthusiasm for the war of the very young should be an example and a stimulus for the older generations.

Moreover, in this narrative the enemy is more explicitly demonized as fierce and cruel. For instance, none of the children want to be Austrian soldiers, since they are “assassins, cowards and mean.” When the children reenact a rescue operation, those who are pretending to be Austrian are reminded that they cannot fire on the Red Cross, in order to expose the enemy’s indisputable barbarism (p.214):

*-E voialtri austriaci dovete prometterci di non tirare sulla Croce Rossa.*

*-Per chi ci pendete?*

*-Per austriaci!*

*-Non cominciate ad offendere.*

*-La verita' offende sempre!*

[-And you, Austrians, you must promise that you will not fire on the Red Cross-.

*-Who do you take us for?-.*

-For Austrians!-

-Do not start to offend us-.

-Truth always offends!-]

Overall, ludic war literature offered a representation of the conflict which allowed children to construct their own interpretation of the current war, albeit extremely simplified and stereotyped, in a relatively safe and serene context. With regard to the implied child reader, this subgenre appears to have been aimed at a double goal. On the one hand, these narratives reassured and downsized children's fears and worries related to a conflict which must have been perceived as ominous and threatening to family serenity. On the other hand, ludic war narratives had a potentially strong appeal to children readers since they offered them the opportunity to overcome their weaknesses and sense of inferiority by experiencing power and superiority over the adult enemy. Overall, they represent an effective anticipation of fascination for war and military life which will be promoted by fascist children's authors.

#### *Children's experience of war on the home front: verist war literature*

The diffusion of a sub-genre of children's war literature dealing with their personal involvement in the conflict as part of the civil front proceeded in parallel with the emergence of an autarchic socio-economic model aimed at withstanding the costs of the current war. In fact, government propaganda promoted the support of the civil population for the war effort as essential to the survival and success of the nation at war.

For instance, it emphasized the importance of civilian involvement through savings and donations of consumer goods and money to the army or through the consumption of products made by Italian industries.

A number of contemporary children's authors devoted their work to the translation of the official patriotic discourse for the youngest generations, by exposing the economical restrictions imposed by the state of war and by making explicit and exemplifying the role of children's personal contribution to the resistance on the home front. These authors resorted to narrative models and features characteristic of Verism, a literary movement which had emerged in Italy during the last two decades of the Nineteenth century. Verist authors, such as Luigi Capuana and Giovanni Verga, aimed to make their fiction a close reflection of true life, a subject largely ignored by that prior nineteenth century Italian literature. In particular, they focused on the expression of sentiments and aspirations of the working classes and rural environment, which they portrayed through melancholic and nostalgic tones. The use of a linguistic register closer to spoken language and permeable to dialects and colloquialisms further enhanced the populist aspect of their work (Dombrosky, 1996). Verist war novels written for children privileged close descriptions of domestic life disrupted by the conflict and the exaltation of its most sentimental aspects. They encouraged children's involvement on the war front by building on simple sentiments, such as their enthusiastic and unquestioned patriotic faith or their frustration at being too young to offer a more important contribution to the war effort. In particular, many examples of this subgenre of children's literature emphasize children's moral imperative to relinquish small treats in order to donate money to the army as a way to compensate for their inability to fight on

the war front. Thus, these authors exposed the restrictions imposed by the costs of the war to juvenile audiences by presenting them as moral obligations and assigning them a distinctive pragmatism.

Therefore, verist children's war literature offered a sort of surrogate heroism that was within children's reach. "When I grow up, I will go to war. For now, I do propaganda", explains the boy protagonist of a verist war novel, Donna Paola's *Pippetto Vuole Andare alla Guerra* [Pippetto Wants to Go to War] (p.14). He then defines his project: "Propaganda means making others do what we do" (p.82). Within this genre, children's valuable contribution was concretized through pragmatic examples, such as maintaining obedient and diligent behaviour, opting for a frugal lifestyle, volunteering to collect donations for the army or choosing toys exclusively made in Italy.

Imagination and fantasy are very rare within this subgenre of children's literature. Instead, the instigation to hate and despise the enemy is particularly strong. The exposure of the meanness and cruelty of the military strategies of the opponent revolves on two main themes; namely, the denunciation of the enemy's identification of children as a primary target of their attack on civil resistance, through bombardments or the supposed discharging of poisoned candies, and the exposure of the insidious Teutonic invasion of consumer goods, aimed at undermining the health of Italian industry and the economy.

Exemplary of this subgenre is *Il Romanzo di Pasqualino* [Pasqualino's Novel] written by Teresah [Teresa Hubertis Gray], first published in installments on the *Corriere dei Piccoli* magazine during 1916, then as a novel in 1917. Teresah was a prolific novelist,

poet, journalist and playwright, best known for her work as a children's author. Her first works for children, published in the first decade of the twentieth century, reflect her creativity and her thoughtful observation of children's sensibilities. They often present melancholic and lightly ironic registers characteristic of the twilight movement (which will be discussed extensively in the following chapter). But after her embracement of the patriotic cause, and later of the fascist ideology, her empathy with the child audience and her originality were overshadowed by a heavy ideological conditioning. Her later novels appear to be aimed at reinforcing patriotic enthusiasm and the cult of war heroes. However, following the establishment of the anti-Semitic laws in 1938, Teresah was enlisted among the "unwelcomed" authors. Her books were banned from schools and libraries and withdrawn from the market (Boero and De Luca, 2010).

*Il Romanzo di Pasqualino* focuses on the everyday life experience of the young boy Pasqualino and his family during the first years of war. Their domestic environment, representative of the Italian upper middle class at the beginning of the twentieth century, is revolutionized by the outbreak of the war. Pasqualino's parents are involved with volunteering in charitable institutions and assisting wounded soldiers in hospitals; his favourite uncle is fighting at the front, and the protagonist and his siblings feel neglected and isolated. The new situation appears hostile and hardly intelligible to the eyes of the child protagonist.

*Da qualche tempo la gente si occupava pochissimo di lui. Certo, era sempre tenuto con tutti i riguardi, vestito, lavato, pettinato, ma a queste cose c'era*

*abituato da troppo tempo per apprezzarle. Cio' che avrebbe desiderato sarebbe stato che la mamma e lo zio Gilberto seguitassero a provvedere alle sue esigenze piu' delicate: giocare al domino con lui, portarlo a spasso come un ometto, rispondere a tutte le domande che gli piacesse di fare.*

[Lately people seemed to have stopped caring about him. Of course, he was still properly looked after, dressed, washed and combed, but he was too used to these attentions to appreciate them. What he would have really liked was that his mother and his uncle Gilberto kept satisfying his most delicate requirements: playing dominoes with him, going out for a walk together as if he was a young man, answer all the questions he asked.]

This passage (p.12) offers a realistic description of what the home front during the Great War might have looked like from the perspective of a young boy. In this paragraph, the author takes Pasqualino's perspective. His awareness of the changes around him and his frustration at the loss of playtime sound genuine and plausible; Pasqualino's talk their linguistic distortions, idiosyncrasies and interpretations of the world and suggest that the author had a genuine concern for children. This sensitivity towards children's feeling is however overshadowed throughout the novel by a shift in the author's perspective towards Pasqualino's private teacher, Orsetta. With the shift in perspective to this omniscient adult character, an enthusiastic war-supporter, Teresah's narration acquires paternalistic and patriotic tones.

Since the new situation appear hostile and hardly intelligible to the eyes of the young protagonist, he looks for keys to interpret his new reality through games and dreams. His

toys assume in this novel an exceptional and highly metaphorical role, since they become both witnesses and promoters of children's support for the patriotic cause. In fact, Pasqualino is given by his teacher Orsetta a box of wooden animals handmade by mutilated soldiers. In the boy's dreams, these toys come alive and describe to him the war as experienced by the soldiers who crafted them, as well as the soldiers' joy at being able to return to work after their injuries (figure 7). Pasqualino hence understands the necessity to renounce foreign toys and to opt instead for those of Italian fabrication, although they are more modest.

*Il Romanzo di Pasqualino* can be interpreted as a patriotic bildungsroman, focused on the boy's personal journey of interpretation and internalization of the patriotic war discourse. Pasqualino's formative path starts from a situation of forced and passive acceptance of the state of war and its effect on the civil front, to arrive at a fervent enthusiasm in sustaining and personally promoting the nationalist cause. The protagonist's initial feelings of dismay and disorientation in confronting the impact of the war on his everyday life are diverted by appealing to his naivety, enthusiasm, willingness to participate in a common cause and desire to imitate adults, all typical of childhood. For example, the war episodes narrated by the toys made by the mutilated soldiers promote admiration and valorization of the soldiers' personal sacrifice on the war front. This process of ideological conditioning reaches an apotheosis when Pasqualino meets in his dreams the soul of a dead soldier who dreads to be forgotten and entrusts him with a sort of moral testament.

Pasqualino hence becomes a spokesman for national propaganda among other children. He openly declares his intolerance for children who do not participate in the war effort.

He despises foreign toys and renames his few German toys with Italian names through a peculiarly pompous baptism ceremony. In the end, he writes a letter addressed to all Italian children, urging them to buy patriotic goods and in particular the toys made by the mutilated soldiers, in order to listen to their stories (p.291):

*Cari bambini italiani,*

*[...] Se volete conoscere tante belle storie, bisogna che comperiate i balocchi italiani! Allora i giocattoli vi diranno la storia di Castrogiovanni [martire di guerra]. Poi cominceranno i sogni. Ma per giocare, non bisogna essere come i Palanchetti [characters in the novel who do not support the official propaganda]. Dunque, viva l'Italia! Abbasso la roba tedesca! Vogliamo la propaganda e i giocattoli italiani! Viva i cari soldati, che non bisogna dimenticarli.*

[Dear Italian children,

[...] If you want to know some good stories, you have to buy Italian toys! Then the toys will tell you the story of Castrogiovanni [war martyr]. And then the dreams will begin. But in order to play, you cannot be like the Palanchetti [characters in the novel who do not support the official propaganda]. Therefore, hurray for Italy! Down with German things! We want the propaganda and Italian toys! Hurray for our dear soldiers, who we must never forget.]

*Il Romanzo di Pasqualino* presents a number of supernatural elements unusual in this subgenre. However, it is remarkable how the realistic descriptions of everyday life



appear relatively sincere and mindful of children's status and perspective, while the fantastic escapades become opportunities to exalt and promote the nationalist rhetoric.

Teresah's narration appears as if poised between her careful and empathetic description of the children's condition and her nationalist vocation devoted to the persuasion of her young readers. Her choices of linguistic registers reflect this tension in the narration: magniloquent patriotic paragraphs are alternated with creative passages which mirror a sincere interest in children's talk and their linguistic distortions, idiosyncrasies and interpretations of the world. Overall, however, the author's nationalist rhetoric dominates her attention to children's sensitivity and her creativity, which end up being exploited to contribute to the ideological conditioning of the young reader.

*Bimbi di Trieste. Scene dal Vero* [Trieste's Children. Scenes from Real Life], written by Haydee [Ida Finzi] in 1916, represents another significant example of verist children's war literature. The novel describes the life of a family living in Trieste on the eve of the war and during the first months of the conflict. In that historical phase, Trieste was an Italian city occupied by the Austrian army: the city was the capital of the area known as "terre irredente" (border lands) whose control was at the core of war propaganda, since the government authorities had justified their interventionist decision on the basis that the Triestine area had to be freed from the "Austrian invader". The author herself was born and bred in Trieste. Therefore, she experienced the condition of Italians living in the Austrian lands she describes in her novels. After the outbreak of the Great War, she moved to Milan where she achieved substantial notoriety as a journalist, poet, and adults' and children's novelist. Through her literary production, she played a significant role in furthering the nationalist cause: she not merely embraced her "Italianness" fully,

but also continued to promote it throughout the life-span of the regime. However, the fascist anti-Semitic provisions interrupted her career in the late thirties. (Pizzi, 2001)

*Bimbi di Trieste. Scene dal Vero* offers a credible although highly sentimental description of the life conditions of the Italian residents of Trieste, and in particular of the strategies of passive resistance carried out by the civil population against the Austrian occupiers to affirm their own national identity. The challenges of everyday life in Trieste are described through the life experience of the Salvani family, composed of three young children and their parents. They suffer the humiliation of not being able to profess their Italian identity, they sustain the persistent menace of being interrogated and confined as patriotic dissidents by the foreign government, and they share with other Italians in Trieste the hope of imminent liberation. The parents reacts against the limitations to the expression of their Italian identity by putting in place strategies of resistance, such as giving their children the patriotic names Giusto, Libera and Italia, collecting donations for Italian charitable institutions, or dressing the children in the colours of the Italian flag. Ultimately, the young family flees from Trieste to live in Milan, where they can express their “Italianness”.

The enthusiasm among the Italian residents of Trieste for the national cause, as well as the beginning of the “liberation” war and its repercussions on the life of the civil population, are observed and interpreted mainly from the point of view of the child protagonists. Their characterization is careful and credible; the author demonstrates consideration for childhood interests, aspirations, limits and difficulties. This is evident, for example, in her delicate and plausible description of the young protagonists making

up “tragic scenes” to go to sleep or of their mortification in front of their parents’ scolding (p.38).

*I ragazzetti si divertivano un mondo [observing a carnival parade with masqueraders dressed up with the colours of the Italian flag], ma la mamma mise una mano sulla bocca di Libera.*

*-Piano, che non svegli Italietta, se no ricomincia a piangere.-*

*Vi era stata infatti una delle solite grandi scene tragiche della nostra amica Italietta, quando aveva dovuto andare a letto prima dei suoi fratellini.*

*-Anch’io “vollo” star a vedere le “macchere! – diceva la signorina “Anta mi” coi begli occhioni celesti grondanti di lagrime. – Anch’io “vollo” andar sulla “finettra”! –*

[The children were having lots of fun [watching from their window a carnival parade with masqueraders dressed up with the colours of the Italian flag], but their mother covered Libera’s mouth with her hand.

–Be quiet, or you will wake up Italietta [nickname for Italia] and she will start crying again-.

There had been in fact one of the usual grand dramatic scenes of our friend Italietta, when she had to go to bed before her brother and sister.

–Me too watch “cannival”!-, Little Miss Me Too had said, with her big blue eyes full of tears. –Me too want to go at the “”widow”!-.]

Haydee's consideration for childhood is mirrored by her choice of a linguistic register carefully chosen never to be banal, yet also within the reach of children's appreciation and understanding. The realistic aspiration of the novel's language is achieved by reflecting the expressivity, curiosity and directness of children's speech and by the occasional use of expressions derived from the youngest child's "baby talk" or from the Triestine dialect:

Children's personalities, sensitivities and idiosyncrasies are, however, constantly subordinated to the nationalist cause and to civil resistance in the "terre irredente". Giusto, Libera and Italia's games, their school experience and social life are characterized by their unwavering desire to assert their Italian identity against the Austrian occupier. For example, the young protagonists amuse themselves by mimicking Austrian authorities, secretly learning patriotic Italian songs, or role-playing the defeat of the invaders. In school, they refuse to sing the Austrian hymn and they wear daisies on their shirts as silent symbols of their Italian identity to irritate their Austrian teachers. The eldest brother, Giusto, is ashamed of not knowing the history of Italy, which is not taught in school, and he implores his teacher to give him private lessons (p.21):

*-Signor maestro- gli chiese un giorno Giusto -Che vuol dire che ci fanno imparare tanta storia austriaca, e gli aneddoti su Rodolfo d'Asburgo e Ottocarro di Boemia, e della storia d'Italia non si impara niente? E' venuto l'altro mese a farci visita un mio cuginetto di Udine, che e' piu' piccolo di me, e sapeva tante cose che io non so, e io mi son proprio vergognato... Non ci potrebbe raccontare qualche cosa anche della storia d'Italia?-*

*Il maestro, che era un bravissimo giovane, sospiro'. –Non si puo', non e' permesso.-*

*E, come aveva fatto il signor Marlich per l'inno d'Italia, soggiunse a mezza voce: -Speriamo che venga un giorno in cui si potra'...-*

[Pardon me, Sir – Giusto once asked- but why do we have to learn so many facts about Austrian history and all those anecdotes on Rodolfo of Habsburgs and Ottocar of Bohemia, and we never learn anything about Italian history? Last month my cousin from Udine came to visit, and despite being younger than me, he knew so many things that I don't know, and I was so ashamed... Could you please teach us something about Italian history?-

The teacher, who was a very good young man, sighed heavily: -I can't do it, it's not allowed-.

And, in the same way as Mr Marlich had done for the Italian hymn, he added, half-voice: Let's hope that one day we will be able to do it...-.]

The Austrian occupier is described by the child protagonists through non-violent and infantile insults, such as “cosi duri e neri”, “patate”, “brutti musi” (“hard and black doodah”, “potatoes”, “ugly faces”). The description of the Italians who chose to side with the enemy is more severe and judgmental. They are portrayed through the child character of Francesco, the son of an Italian officer who works for the Austrian government: Francesco, who denies his Italian identity to support the Austrian occupation, is isolated by his classmates, and he is described as a spy, a coward and a traitor.

Ultimately, Haydee's *Bambini di Trieste* are presented as behavioural models. Their spontaneous and enthusiastic adhesion to the national cause is described in the novel as exemplary and inspirational for their peers as well for the adults who surround them. It seems therefore plausible to infer that, through her realist children's portraits, the author aimed at guiding her young readers' internalization of patriotic doctrine and at enabling them to confront the demands and uncertainties of the war in agreement with the dominant ideology.

Further examples of the subgenre of verist children's war literature are offered by some of the short stories from the previously mentioned collection *I Ragazzi e la Guerra*. However, sentimentalism and pathos are prevailing features in Marga's stories. Marga celebrates the hardships and privations related to warfare, as well as the brave and joint reaction of the Italian people on the home front. The poetics of Verism are reflected by Carlo Chiostri's black and white illustrations, which appear to be aimed at representing the reality of children's conditions during the war in its most melodramatic aspects (Faeti, 2011). The aura casted through chiaroscuro effects on the images of children highlights the honorable and desirable qualities of the sacrifices and hardship required by war .

The vicissitudes of Marga's child protagonists read as opportunities to show the influence of adult characters' examples and values on infant minds. The child protagonists of these stories tend in fact to imitate their parents' enthusiastic civil engagement in support of the war, often emphasizing the motivations and radicalizing the consequences, to the point that the roles are reversed and children become models and reprimands for the adults surrounding them. This is the case, for example, in the

story *Pro Mutilati*, set in an urban middle-class household. The young protagonists Nino and Ninetto listen to their parents' discussion on the importance of a charitable organization for mutilated soldiers and on ways of saving money in order to offer a financial contribution to it. Afterwards, while visiting the organization, the two brothers meet a poor old lady, all alone in the world since her five sons are fighting the war on the front; however, she explains to the children that she is serene since her sons "have promised to do their duty until their last drop of blood" (p.37). Not having any money left, she is donating her wedding ring to the charitable organization.

Deeply moved and persuaded by these adult examples, Nino and Ninetto pledge to relinquish new toys, sweets and trips to the movies, and they begin to contrive plans to support the organization for the mutilated. In the end, they secretly donate their mother's precious pearl necklace. Their parents get angry, but the children "have a clear conscience and the certainty of having accomplished their duty" (p.40). The grownups who "give voice to human egoism" meet in their sons' glance "a silent reproach". Nino and Ninetto remind their parents of their words and of the importance of putting them into practice with consistency: "vanities and luxuries, everything has to be sacrificed on the altar of the Nation" (p.42).

The story *Il Nido Insanguinato* (*The Bloodstained Nest*) is set instead in a "nido", one of the daycare centres for preschool children instituted by the government to respond to the social exigencies related to the current war. The conscription of fathers and the necessity for mothers to work had in fact created a need for assistance of young children, especially in urban areas. The story offers the author an opportunity to describe the excellent reaction of the State to these challenging situations, and to celebrate the

braveness and solidarity among Italian people when confronting the consequences of the war on the civic front. The narrator points out how “now, more than ever before, life is a fight for everybody”, but “people compete in charitable work and sacrifices”, and “even women fight with their thread and needles” (p.157).

Children’s life in the “nido” is described as idyllic. Guided by kind and solicitous teachers, children learn to play together, they develop good manners and a passion for learning, and they celebrate their national identity. The child protagonists are proud to wear an old shirt or a hat which their soldier fathers wore on the battlefields, and they dream of being close to them in their battles. In their discussions, the motivations of the war are reduced to slogan-like considerations, such as “There has to be a war because we are civilized people, but the Austrians and the Germans are barbaric people” (p.155). The children inspire in the adults who observe them pride, hope and motivation for sustaining the war effort on the home front. The story ends tragically with an Austrian bombing raid which destroys the “nido”: this offers an opportunity to the narrator to reinforce the theme of the consequences of the cruelty of the enemy on the civil front, which is at the core of many stories in Marga’s collection.

The popular children’s magazine *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* published many examples of verist war literature in the form of short stories, whose tones became progressively more somber and dramatic in parallel with the progression of the conflict. Most of these tales have a strong didactic approach, largely focused on prohibitions and threats. Overall, the authors of these realistic moralizing tales show a limited ability for creative invention or the valorization of children’s sensitivity and language. Their most frequent subjects are the everyday sacrifices imposed on children by the war and the celebration of their small



contributions as part of a unanimous moral and economic commitment of civilians in support of the Italian army.

Exemplary of the stories published by *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* is *La Bocca Dolce* (*The Sweet Tooth*) by Cesara Lupati, which appeared in 1917. In this story the child protagonist is asked to renounce his daily sweet because of the rising cost of living imposed by the war. His mother explains to him patiently the necessity and value of his sacrifice (p.34):

*-Caro piccolo uomo! Non immaginavo che una causa grande, immensa per la tua coscienza appena albeggiante, avrebbe chiesto anche a te l'olocausto della rinuncia-.*

*Ma la piccola coscienza volle superare se stessa. Fui io a prepararla al doveroso cimento.*

*-Vedi amore, la nostra Italia in questo momento e' come una grande mamma che ha bisogno di tutti i suoi figlioli. I grandi, lo sai, danno il loro sangue, la loro forza, la loro vita. Noi donne si fa quel che si puo' per supplire i fratelli lontani: ma anche voi piccini dovete ora aiutarla!-.*

*Un moto d'orgoglio gli fece allora balenare la testina e gli mise un balenio negli occhi: - La zuppa col cavolo nero e' tanto buona-, concluse, quasi per consolarsi, e non disse altro.*

[-My dear little man! I couldn't foresee that our big cause, an immense one for your dawning conscience, would have required even from you the holocaust of the relinquishment!-

But his little conscience was determined to exceed itself. I myself prepared it for the hard trial.

-You see, my love, at this moment our Italy is like a big mum who needs all her children. Adults, as you know, are giving their blood, their strength, their life. We, the women, we do what we can to help our brothers at the front: but now you, children, you have to help her too!-.

A sense of pride stirred his little head and lightened his eyes: -Black cabbage soup is really good-, he concluded, almost to console himself, and he did not say anything else.]

This passage is an example of the more somber and realist tones that verist literature took in the later years of the Great War. Fantasy and frivolity were shunned, in favour of a more unequivocally noble representation of children's sacrifices and support for their fatherland. This representation is emphasized by the choice of an emphatic and sermonizing linguistic register, pervaded by a persistent rhetorical tone.

Overall, authors of verist children's war literature required from their young readers an act of absolute trust and hope for the future of the nation, based on an active engagement as part of the home front. Their production suggested that any form of criticism and skepticism should have been left aside in order to reach a rapid and successful conclusion to the conflict. The encouragement of these practices of unquestioned

acceptance of the dominant ideology represented fertile ground for the diffusion of the fascist discourse. This subgenre also highlighted reciprocity between the child model and the civil front: on the one hand, the atmosphere and values created by adult authorities on the home front encouraged children to identify with the country at war and sustain the war effort. On the other hand, the child's adhesion to an extremely austere, virtuous and obedient life model set a standard for the adults surrounding him.

#### *Children as miniature soldiers: adventure war literature*

Most significantly, the Great War period was characterized by a prominent diffusion of novels and stories based on the character of the child-soldier. These narratives were built on the common stereotype of a young protagonist who resolves to escape from home to join the army. On the battlefield, he proves his courage and value, and experiences the war as heroic protagonist. The character of the child-soldier appears thus as an important propagandistic figure, able to satisfy children's need for identification and involvement in the nationalistic cause and the war. In fact, young readers could find in this stereotype a confirmation of the idea of the indispensability of children's involvement in the war effort. These adventure war narratives conveyed the implicit expectation that, although unable to actually fight on the field, children would support the war effort on the civil front with the same commitment and enthusiasm demonstrated by the literary characters.

The young protagonists of these narratives show a fanatical curiosity for the current war: their utmost desire is to be able to observe it closely and take part in the action. In response to these attitudes, adventure war novels were constructed through a

combination of realistic, meticulous accounts of practical aspects of soldiers' lives, such as descriptions of their equipment or their meals, and romanticized, idyllic portrayals of life in the trenches and of the improbable exploits of the child protagonist.

Most authors of the subgenre of adventure war novels adhered rather strictly to the stereotype of the child soldier, replicating his path towards the battlefield with minimal variations and showing little creative capability or cultural criticism. Their stylistic choices appear just as limited: the young heroes' vicissitudes and sacrifices for their country are described through affected tones and pompous and flamboyant linguistic registers. The resulting emphatic and moralistic registers are often achieved by magniloquent descriptions and relentless rhetoric.

The premature enlistment of the young protagonists in the adventure war novels results in most cases both from a desire to emulate of fathers and older brothers, and from an attempt to escape rules and codes of conduct imposed by their domestic environment. These narratives can thus be interpreted as exemplifying the military *bildungsroman*. The boy who escapes from home to join the army is trying to find a way to witness and experience the war, but at the same time he is engaging in an independent search for values to endorse and for alternative authorities to which he can deliberately submit. His direct participation in the conflict becomes a sort of initiation ritual, in which the entry into adulthood and the construction of a new self-image occur through enthusiastic and fanatical adhesion to the patriotic cause.

However, adventure war fiction reveals a contrast between the child protagonist's desire for freedom or adventure and his condition as a result of his recruitment. In fact, once

the young hero is enlisted, his ambitions are constrained by strict military discipline; he willingly submits to the army authorities in order to take part in the action, but his resigned and meek submission contradicts his initial passionate search for independent and individual affirmation. As a consequence, the protagonists of these narratives are lacking in verisimilitude and psychological depth and appear to be constructed as mere vehicles of patriotic ideology for young reading audiences.

Exemplary of the subgenre of adventure war literature is the novel *Pinocchio contro l'Austria* (*Pinocchio against Austria*), written by Bruno Bruni in 1915. The text belongs to the “Pinocchiate”, a series of narratives written by different authors published between the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, all constructed as sequels of the adventures of the famous puppet. In Bruni’s novel, however, the identification of the protagonist Pinocchio with Collodi’s character appears rather remote and strained, mainly limited to his long nose and his ability to get into trouble (Figure 6).

Bruni’s narrative adheres closely to the traditional plot of the adventure war novel: Pinocchio lives in a big city with a rich aunt, but when he learns that Italy has entered the war, he decides to escape to fight as a soldier. Neither his young age nor his lack of money keeps him from realizing his project: through a series of strange encounters and daring escapes, which test and reinforce his patriotic convictions, he manages to join the battlefields. There he proves his courage by foiling an Austrian attack, risking his life but coming out alive. Pinocchio is finally forced to return home, but only after having been nominated for a medal for valour.

For Pinocchio, the journey to the front represents a difficult but thrilling path towards maturity and his public recognition as an adult (p.94):

*[Dopo aver combattuto in prima linea contro gli Austriaci] Pinocchio conquista le simpatie di tutti, ed il generale gli stringe ripetute volte la mano, encomiandolo per il coraggio e per l'intelligenza di cui ha dato prova. Pinocchio e' anche piu' su del settimo cielo: sente d'essere un uomo e ormai non dubita menomamente che il generale non gli permettera' di arruolarsi seduto stante, tra quei bersaglieri che gli destano tanta ammirazione e tanta invidia.*

[After having fought against the Austrian enemy] Pinocchio wins everybody's favour, and the general shakes his hand repeatedly, lauding him for the bravery and cleverness he demonstrated. Pinocchio is now in heaven, or even somewhere above: he feels like a man and he is sure that the general will allow him to enlist immediately among these *bersaglieri* who stir in him so much admiration and envy.]

This change is highlighted by the strong contrast between the initial stiff and uneventful urban setting, where Pinocchio's nature is limited by the rules imposed by his aunt, and the Friulian mountains where the conflict takes place, which are described as open spaces, bright and lively, and sanctified by the presence of the army.

Pinocchio's maturation occurs within the propagandistic warrior discourse. His initial psychological traits of enthusiasm, generosity, inventiveness and boldness, typical of childhood, decline into attitudes of visceral and unwavering patriotism. His behaviour

becomes increasingly violent and hateful: Pinocchietto dreams about arms and massacres, and he plans to punish not only the Austrian enemy, but anyone who has political beliefs different from his own, such as neutrals and pacifists, and even children who do not show interest in his plans to go to the front. By acknowledging and complying with the aspirations and needs of childhood and directing them towards political engagement, the child-soldier stereotype conveyed by Pinocchietto is particularly efficient in introducing child readers to the contemporary dominant patriotic ideology.

Other adventure war novels published in the same historical period present an even more prominent sentimentalist and pathetic element. This is the case, for example, of *Primavera Italiche (Italic Springs)*, written by Olga Visentini in 1915. Visentini's career as a writer was inspired by her work as a primary teacher in the first decades of the twentieth century, which led her to witness the strained circumstances of the working classes. To the social unrest and discontent, she responded through the production of highly idealistic children's novels, which exalted the value of God, family and fatherland. She was a fervent nationalist and later a supporter of the fascist party. In fact, during the Ventennio, she became an established children's writer, but also a children's literature critic and pedagogue (Boero and De Luca, 2010).

In *Primavera Italiche*, Visentini describes the vicissitudes of a large family forced by the war to return to Milan from Alsace, where they had lived as immigrant workers. Despite the joy of being back in their country, the family struggles to survive because of mounting unemployment and incipient poverty. When Italy enters the war, the whole family, including men and women, the elderly and the children, are involved in the

general mobilization. The narration focuses in particular on the character of the boy Lorenzo, who escapes from Milan to fight on the war front and ultimately dies as a martyr in the mountains of Veneto.

Through the characterization of the members of the family, the author offers a maudlin and stylized description of the Italian people, portraying them as hopeful and resistant when facing challenging situations related to the current war. Through the point of view of Lorenzo and his younger sister Aurora, who are forced to work as street musicians to support their family, the author describes the harsh life conditions of the lower class. In their embrace of the ideal of the fatherland and their vocation to achieve national unity through personal sacrifice as promulgated by the current dominant ideology, the two young siblings find a way of overcoming and escaping their personal and social hardships.

Lorenzo's decision to join the army is not just ascribed to the results of an evolution from war games to real fighting driven by infantile enthusiasms and curiosity, as it was for Pinocchietto. Lorenzo's fervent and unconditional support of the patriotic cause appears rather as the result of profound uneasiness and dissatisfaction, related to the absence of future prospects and of ideals other than mere daily survival. Hence, Lorenzo directs his energies and frustrations toward a patriotic commitment involving relinquishment, solitude, melancholy and self-sacrifice.

He abandons the suffocating urban environment to reach the Alps, described as a mythical source of physical and moral inspiration. The life conditions of the soldiers are perceived by the young protagonist as rough, yet lively and enviable: the meals are "the



best food he had ever tasted”, the trenches are “solid, comfortable and very merry”, and at nighttime “the music of the cannon and that of the guitar alternate”(p.120). In the final action that immortalizes him as a war hero, Lorenzo emulates the Risorgimental hero Pietro Micca by sacrificing his life to light a fuse which will make the enemy trench explode. While bleeding to death, he declares himself to be happy and invokes freedom from the Austrian occupier (p.157).

A corollary to the story of the child soldier is the theme of the joint mobilization of the civil and war fronts, developed through the parallel vicissitudes of the two siblings Lorenzo and Aurora. While the boy has a direct experience of the war in the mountains, the girl is involved in the mobilization of the civil front. Their reciprocal love and support symbolize the cohesion of the civil and military fronts, as well as of the female and male dimensions, during wartime.

An additional subject developed through the novel is the solidarity between different generations and the portrait of the war as the ideal prosecution of the process of national unification begun with the Risorgimental wars. In fact, mobilization also involves the grandfather Paolo, who had fought with Garibaldi’s army as a young soldier. Eager to return to the front to pursue his youthful ideals, he enlists as volunteer together with his oldest grandson. After having decided to enlist, grandfather and grandson support each other in communicating their decision to the rest of the family (p.61):

*Poi discesero nelle camerette e soleggendosi l’un l’altro come una primavera antica e una primavera nova, avvinte in indissolubile vincolo di un solo, d’un eterno amore, diedero l’annunzio a le donne.*

[Then they returned to their rooms, and supporting each other like an ancient spring and a brand new spring, bound by an indissoluble tie of an only, eternal love, they announced their resolution to the women.]

Older and younger soldiers appear then to share the same values and myths. Young people envy the elderly because “they have lived for one light and now they are going to die for it” (p.66).

The symbolic unions between civil and war fronts and older and younger generations are reasserted in the conclusion of the novel, when the family learns about the circumstances of Lorenzo’s death. Their harrowing grief reinforces their patriotic conviction, and the old grandmother, who had lost a son during the Risorgimental wars, encourages Lorenzo’s mother to follow her example and to be proud of her son’s sacrifice for his country (p.166):

*-Perche’ disperare? Siamo madri italiane. Dobbiamo essere orgogliose se dal nostro dolore balzano delle luci. Renzo e’ un eroe, l’hai donato alla patria....per la liberta’ dei popoli e il diritto delle genti-.*

*Maria [the mother] ora piangeva: quell’episodio antico si era allacciato al nuovo: le lacrime le toglievano dall’anima la gravita’ stupita delle prime ore, dandole il dolore piu’ sublime: quello che fa piangere e che e’ quindi cosciente.*

[-Why despairing? We are Italian mothers. We must be proud if our sorrow generates light. Renzo is a hero, you have given him to the Fatherland...for the freedom and the right of all people-.

Now Maria [the mother] was crying: the old episode [the death of her brother during the Risorgimental war] and her new grief became one. Her tears washed away from her soul her initial astonished grief, giving her a more sublime sorrow: the one that makes people cry, and is therefore more conscious.]

Themes and messages of the adventure war novel were also conveyed through short stories proposing a model of the child soldier based on real-life episodes. These stories offered a moralistic and romantic reading of episodes of war involving young heroes, and an explicit invitation to children and their parents to commemorate and honour their sacrifice for the country.

Examples of real-life child soldiers were drawn both from recent and contemporary national history. For example, *I Bimbi d'Italia si Chiaman Balilla. I Ragazzi Italiani nel Risorgimento Nazionale (Italian Children are Called Balilla. Italian Youth in the National Risorgimento)*, written by Vamba in 1915, is a collection of stories based on events of the Independence wars of the nineteenth century. Vamba was the pseudonym of Eugenio Colmo, a successful and influential journalist and novelist, and the director of the popular children's magazine *Il Giornalino della Domenica (The Sunday Little Magazine)*. Through his magazine, he contributed to the diffusion of the nationalistic ideology among young generations, up to his death in 1920. His loyalty to the patriotic cause is prominent in *I Bimbi d'Italia si Chiaman Balilla. I Ragazzi Italiani nel Risorgimento Nazionale*, a collection of stories based on events of the Independence wars of the nineteenth century. With somber and violent tones, these stories exalt the heroism of Italian children who offered their lives for the unification of the country, and challenged and humiliated the enemy. The author identifies them as role models for his

young readers, to whom he explicitly assigns the task of pursuing the objectives of the Risorgimento by facing the current war with the same courage and abnegation.

The protagonists of *Piccoli Eroi della Grande Guerra* (*Little Heroes of the Great War*), written by Teresah in 1915, are instead contemporary but foreign children, in particular Belgian and French, who are involved in episodes of war fighting and resistance as sentries, spies or alpine guides. Their vicissitudes offer to the author the opportunity to exalt their patriotic pride and to encourage his young audience to confront the challenges of the present war with similar “pride in their own race” (p.34):

*Amare non basta: bisogna sentire in se' qualche cosa che oltrevarichi anche l'amore. Un senso grandioso del rispetto che noi dobbiamo a questa patria nostra, la vera coscienza del bene che noi possiamo farle anche soltanto nel considerarla come la piu' alta, la piu' bella. E questo bene, all'Italia nostra, noi di rado lo facciamo! Noi non la teniamo in tal concetto che sia degno della sua gloria passata, del suo presente fortunoso e del suo avvenire cosi' lucente di speranza. Noi ci dimentichiamo spesso che essere Italiani e' pure una sorte mirabile e che nulla abbiamo da invidiare agli altri in quanto nobilta' di natali. Dobbiamo sentirci felici e fieri di essere Italiani [...]. In questo orgoglio di razza c'e' tutto: appoggio, difesa, mutuo soccorso, profonda incrollabile inesauribile solidarieta' nazionale.*

[To love her is not enough: we must feel inside us something that goes beyond love. A grandiose feeling of respect that we owe to our fatherland, an awareness of how we must consider her as the highest and the most beautiful country. And

yet, we rarely feel this way! We do not glorify enough her past glory, her lucky present and her bright future. We often forget that being Italian is an admirable fate and that we have nothing to envy to others in terms of nobility of birthplace. We must feel glad and honoured to be Italians [...]. Being proud of our race means everything: support, defense, mutual help, and profound unshakable inexhaustible national solidarity.]

This passage concludes one of the many stories of children's personal sacrifice collected in this text. The child protagonist's death is ennobled by the magniloquent, verbose choice of linguistic register. As in *Primavere Italiane*, children's sacrifice are invariably represented as noble the cult of the national past, namely the battles of the Risorgimento, is used as one of the devices that children's authors put in place to facilitate acceptance of death and violence

*The relation between children's war literature and contemporary political and cultural discourses, and its influence on the emergent fascist ideology*

Although antecedent to the effective establishment of the fascist government, the First World War years and the first post-war period had a crucial importance for the development of fascist discourse. The association between childhood and the patriotic and martial ideology to be consolidated by fascism emerged in this period. Moreover, the celebration of events and sacrifices related to the war was to become one of the pillars of fascist mythology.

As discussed in this chapter, children's literature published in this historical period reflected and contributed to this association. The subgenre of children's literature on war, which can be considered the most popular and varied genre at the time, conveyed cultural values and images that represented an important foundation for the beginning of the politicization of children and the incorporation of their reading matter in the mechanism of propaganda during the fascist era.

The analysis of contemporary children's books and magazines demonstrates a progressive deviation from the conception children as innocent victims to be protected from the trauma and tragedy of the war, through their role as witnesses and active protagonists of civilian involvement in war dynamics, to their depiction as miniature soldiers with heroic aspirations. Moreover, it witnessed the creation of the nationalist and warrior rhetoric that was to be at the heart of the fascist discourse.

In fact, during the Ventennio, children's literature became a vehicle for conveying to the young generations the values and models of behaviour of the dominant ideology, and for fostering the formation of personalities able to assume the role requested by the demagogic project of the new state (Gibelli, 2005). Children's authors' adherence to the project of children's fascistisation resulted in narratives which appear as mere vehicles of political socialization, aimed at promoting unanimous consensus. The relentless recurrence of the same topics, the superficiality of many characters, the magniloquent and redundant language, the explicit didacticism and the inflexible moralism resulted in the limited artistic value of most fascist children's literature (Boero and De Luca, 2009).

One of the most recurring topics within fascists children's literature is the correlation of ideals between the Great War and the Fascist Revolution of 1922 (Fochesato, 2011). The search for a widespread consensus and support of the regime among youth required the diffusion of an interpretation of the events related to the origins of the movement that could justify its violent seizure of power and its celebration. In response to this necessity, fascist pedagogues promoted the myth of the ideal genesis of the regime, based on an interpretation of contemporary history which established a communion of ideals and a consequential relation between the First World War and the fascist revolution (Colin, 2010).

This interpretation of national history identified the Great War as a revolutionary event that had started a radical change of all aspects of everyday civilian life. This should have led to the establishment of a new Italian society, founded on the cult of the fatherland. But, in the post-war period, the renewal of the Italian society had been impeded by the rebellious interventions of the communist party and by the weakness of the political leaders. The exponent of early fascism, known as the black shirts, took it upon themselves to complete the project of reconstruction of the national community which was left unfinished after the conclusion of the war (Tarquini, 2011). Indeed, the Black Shirts identified themselves as the moral heirs of the veterans and martyrs of the Great War. They interpreted fascism as a faith and they exalted physical violence and heroic impetus as political instruments. Within this interpretation of history, the fascist *coup d'état* of 1922, known as 'the black shirts' revolution', represented the legitimate completion of the process of social regeneration which had begun with the Great War (Gentile, 2008).

The myth of the ideal genesis of fascism as moral heir of the Great War was proposed to young readers through historical novels based on the description of children's experience and perspective of the sociocultural climate of the post-war period and the black shirts' revolution. Examples of this genre Eros Belloni's *Guerra!* [War!], Renzo Pezzani's *Corcontento* [Happy Hearth] or Piero Ottolini's *Camicia Rossa Camicia Nera* [Red Shirt, Black Shirt]. These texts can be read as the evolution of the adventure war novel within the fascist ideology. The stereotypical miniature soldier of the adventure war novel becomes a young fanatical fascist, eager to experience the same adventures and battles of the child characters of the war adventure books. Mirroring the miniature soldier's most widespread plot, the miniature fascist appears at the beginning of his story as a little rascal, cheerful and thoughtless. He runs away from home to join the fascist cops. Instead of joining the battlefields like to miniature soldier, he joins the Camicie Nere (the fascist squads) into punitive expeditions against communists and political dissidents, thus becoming a young hero.

Novels belonging to this genre often have a stereotypical father or grandfather who has fought in the Great War. Just as the link between the Risorgimento and World War One, this correlation is aimed at reinforcing and justifying the fascist seizure of power; it embodies a communion of ideals among veterans of the Great War and young fascists for the project of renewal of the Italian society.

Another typical feature of the adventure fascist novels that relates to the adventure war novel is deprecation and stereotyping of the antagonist. In the adventure war novel, Austrian and German soldiers were often portrayed as barbarous and cruel. In absence of a foreign foe, the fascist young hero fights against Communists and socialists,



invariably portrayed as coarse and coward, and often described as puppets under the control of mysterious Russian agitators. The young fascist hero's interpretation of Italian society is completely polarized between patriots and defeatists; it lacks any opportunity for analysis or acknowledgement of psychological complexities.

These narrative features are an example of how fascist children's authors drew heavily on themes and strategies typical of the adventure war novel. However, they magnified and exacerbate their most political and most violent aspect.

The analysis of Olga Visentini's novel *L'Ombra sulla Strada* [The Shadow on the Road], published in 1933, offers an example of the correlation between the young fascist novel and the adventure war novel. Visentini was the author of 1916 *Primavera Italiche* discussed earlier in this chapter. In *L'Ombra sulla Strada*, the young protagonist Lorenzo dies heroically in the fight against communist subversion. The circumstances of his sacrifice highlight the communists' cowardice and exalt the virtues associated by the fascist discourse to the young black shirts, such as generosity, straightforwardness, and commitment to the patriotic cause.

Lorenzo is identified by the author a role model for his younger companion Elio because he is already involved in the black shirts' punitive expeditions against the communists. Lorenzo appears to his younger friend as "the hero of a new, different fairy tale" (p.127).

Lorenzo's participation in the punitive expeditions acquires a playful and adventurous quality in the eyes of Elio. Lorenzo's involvement with older black shirts appears to him as a unique opportunity to meet older combatants and to handle arms, which had been

characteristic of the First World War trenches. The protagonist's reflections highlight how the participation in the fascist purges becomes a way to satisfy young men's feeling of lost opportunity and their need to find an alternative way to serve their fatherland and emulate war heroes. Therefore, when Lorenzo finally proposes to Elio to join him in an expedition against the communists, Elio feels "like a soldier who has been admitted to the army ranks" (p.188). However, Lorenzo is fatally shot during an outing with the black shirts. The witnessing of Lorenzo's slow death and to his final declaration of commitment to the fascist cause have a decisive impact on Elio's political conversion, all the more so because they involve someone of his own age.

The sacrifice of the protagonist of *L'Ombra sulla Strada* recalls the death of the child soldier who died in the trenches in a previous novel of Visentini, *Primavere Italiane*, which I have analysed in this chapter. The two child characters share the same name, Lorenzo. They both die as heroes, sacrificing their lives for their fatherland. They both suffer a slow but peaceful death. Moreover, the two child characters receive a similar eulogy. In fact, Lorenzo's father reminds his mourning family that his son should be celebrated as "a young martyr, fallen for his flag, just like those who fought on the Alps during the war" (p.211). Similarly for Lorenzo in *Primavere Italiane*, at the conclusion of the novel Lorenzo Arrighi's father forbids his family to cry for him (p.213).

Another fundamental topic that emerges within the body of work of fascist children's literature is the concern with the everyday life of the perfect fascist child, known as the Balilla [named after a heroic child figure of the Risorgimento], the cell of the party's youth corps. The portrayal of the fascist child's desires needs and achievements offered by these narratives aimed at asserting the myth of the new generation as the ideal

foundation for the establishment of the new civilization which was central to the fascist discourse.

Many contemporary children's authors contributed to defining and familiarizing young readers with the desirable characteristics of the Balilla. Young fascists' expected aspirations, achievements and needs were identified and described through novels and tales based on the everyday life of Balilla children and their families. Similarly to the verist war novel described earlier in this chapter, which portrayed children's experience of war on the home front and their eagerness to express their patriotism through acts of sacrifice in their everyday life, these narratives appear as specifically aimed to offer to the child readers models of conduct to aspire to in order to demonstrate their adhesion to the fascist ideology within their family and community. In fact, the protagonists of this subgenre are perfect miniature fascists: they combine physical strength with mental agility; they display ardent nationalist sentiment; they criticize all things foreign; they are brave and bold, and animated by an unrestrained political activism; and they are ready to fight and die to defend their fascist values

In many novels dedicated to the everyday life of the Balilla, the child protagonist undergoes an apparent process of physical and intellectual maturation. However, his evolution is manipulated and uncritical, echoing the uncritical process of maturation of the child protagonists of verist war novels. The final outcome, that is the regimentation in the fascist ranks, and the way to reach it, are already perfectly obvious from the start.

An example of this parallelism can be traced in *Balillino del suo Papa', una ne Pensa e una ne Fa* [Balillino of His Dad, When He Thinks about Something Then He Does it

Straightaway], written by Teresah in 1928. Teresah was also the author of *Il romanzo di Pasqualino*, published in 1917 and discussed earlier in this chapter.

The child protagonist is nicknamed Balillino. He is introduced as the cousin of Pasqualino. In the first chapter, the author declares that she will assume that if her young readers had shared Pasqualino's nationalist pride and commitment to the war propaganda, they would surely aspire to become fascists. Therefore, they will grow fond of Pasqualino's cousin, whose greatest desire is to become a Balilla. Balillino is thus presented as the moral heir of the children who had joined the civil mobilisation during the First World War.

Balillino is the son of uncle Gilberto, who fought the Great War and then "the day after he put away his green uniform, he began to wear the black one" (p.34). Both Pasqualino and Balillino's families have become "fasciste, fascistissime". The young protagonist's familial environment appears serene and unanimous. Family dynamics and dialogues are characterized by the continuous reference to the regime and Mussolini. The bribing strategies through which Balillino's mother tries to make him behave are particularly revealing. For example, she promises Balillino that if he plays quietly she will sew him a black shirt like his father's; or, she tells him that if he finishes his soup he will make Mussolini happy. Balillino's social environment thus reflects the image of contemporary Italian society as promulgated by the fascist propaganda. Now that the regime has resolved the social conflict of the post-war period and eliminated the dissidents, all Italians, young and old, rich and poor, appear happily united by their shared fascist values.

Balillino's maturation takes place in this exemplary fascist familial environment and under the control of the regime. At the opening of the novel, the protagonist is only five, so he cannot yet enroll in the Balilla groups. However, he already shows attitudes and desires typical of the propaganda associated with older children. For example, his greatest desire is to wear black shirts; he is impatient and bold; when he is upset, he plans to take revenge by violent punishments, such as threatening to make his puppy drink castor oil when the puppy refuses to obey his orders (19). Balillino also presents some typical traits of childhood. Like in her previous verist novel, the author presents a convincing portrait of a young child's feelings and needs. For instance, he refuses to eat his soup; he gets angry when he is given a candy that he doesn't like; and, he tries to colour his shirt in black using ink, thus making a big mess. However, along with Balillino's maturation into a Balilla, his spontaneity and ingenuity are gradually suppressed, in favour of the qualities that will enable him to become a member of the ONB, such as obedience, physical strength, and loyalty.

The story of Balillino is narrated in first person by his private teacher, Orsetta. Orsetta was also Pasqualino's tutor, and, like in Pasqualino's story, her voice is omniscient and paternalistic. Her narration is not limited to her observation of Balillino's progresses and achievements, but she also reports the boy's interior monologues about his dreams and achievements. She often adopts aggressive and pedagogically severe tones, characterized by peremptory prose, affirmative assertions and patriotic emphasis, which did not allow any perplexities to her young pupil.

When left to choose his own games, Balillino chooses to pretend to be taking part to a fascist marches or to re-enact famous characters of the fascist mythology. In both

*Pasqualino*’ Novel and *Balillino del suo Papa*’ the nationalist and propagandistic message appears easily accessible to child readers because it is presented under the disguise of the role-play, a situation that most children can understand and relate to.

Balillino’s response to the education imparted by his family and his teacher corresponds to the desirable outcome of the regime’s formative strategies. Balillino feels like “the heir of a bold race” and he promises to “obey and sacrifice myself to make Italy a great nation”, thus honoring and continuing the tradition of the national heroes who preceded him (p.238). Balillino’s evolution into a perfect Balilla seems to follow a restricted and univocal growing path, whose final product is already inscribed in the initial one, as suggested by Balillino’s nickname. Similarly to Pasqualino and the child protagonists of the verist war novel, Balillino’s maturation does not allow uncertainties, errors, or criticism. The path is entirely laid out, and there is little left for the child to do but obey his educators and evolve into the expected product of their pedagogical strategies.

These examples of the evolution of the adventure war novel and the verist war novel in the fascist Ventennio, are paradigmatic of how children’s literature on war published between 1914 and 1921 marked the beginning of the incorporation of children and their literature into the mechanism of propaganda. The process of nationalization of children’s book that began with the Great War anticipated the increasingly prominent role that the fascist government was to assign to children’s literature in promoting children’s political engagement.

### Chapter Three: Expressions of resistance against the nationalistic appropriation of children's literature during the historical period in focus

During the Great War years and the first post-war period, many authors and editors assumed positions of resistance against the nationalistic appropriation of children's literature. In parallel with the development of literature focused on children's involvement with the patriotic and martial discourse which I have analyzed in the previous chapter, this historical period witnessed the diffusion of many alternative narratives. Most of these narratives can be classified as belonging to two currents: the twilight movement and the comic and satirical genre. Authors of both currents were inspired by narrative styles and poetics which had become popular in Italy at the beginning of the century as a result of recent psychological research and of contemporary European avant-garde movements. Their influence led to a renewed attention to children's educational and emotional needs and to their perception of reality.

Both genres experienced a final flourishing in the second decade of the twentieth century: this last development can be accorded a particular value as the last manifestation of a freedom of expression that was progressively and rapidly reappraised in subsequent years. Moreover, these manifestations of resistance introduced strategies followed during the fascist period. In the following paragraphs, I shall analyse the pedagogical philosophies underlying the two currents and the work of some of their

significant exponents, with the aim of highlighting how the image of childhood that they proposed challenged the one advanced by the dominant ideology.

*The influence of the twilight current on the development of the image of childhood and of children's literature in the early twentieth century*

The emergence of the twilight literary movement in Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century resulted from a widespread dissatisfaction with the conservative cultural climate that had characterized the previous decades. The epithet “twilight” (“*crepuscolari*”) was coined by the literary critic Giuseppe Antonio Borghese in 1910 to refer to a condition of consumption and decline, which he attributed to a group of authors who rejected the solemn tones, pompous rhetoric and elaborate imagery which had distinguished late nineteenth century literature (Dombroski, 1996). Instead, twilight poets and novelists focused on popular culture, everyday life and domestic environments, which they expressed through both thematic and stylistic choices (Savoca, 1978).

With regard to the image of childhood and literature dedicated to children, the twilight authors' stance was heavily influenced by the writings of the contemporary poet Giovanni Pascoli. Pascoli's pedagogic theories were extensively illustrated in his literary manifesto *Il Fanciullino* [The Little Child], published in 1897. In this long essay, the poet resurrects and advocates the platonic myth of the inner child who survives in the adult persona. This archetypal child is characterized by innocence, naivety, serenity and total alienation from the turmoil and ambiguities of the adult soul. Because of these attributes, the “fanciullino” is able to observe reality with a fresh,



astonished and aesthetic glance. Pascoli presents this amazed and unconditioned contemplation as the only one able to grasp the deepest essence of natural phenomena and fully appreciate the mystery and significance of human existence. According to Pascoli's theories, the permanence and resonance of this archetypal child in the adult persona is a source of authentic knowledge, a catalyzer of emotions and epiphanies, and is therefore highly desirable. Within this discourse, the writer is described as someone endowed with a peculiar ability to listen to the internal voice of the "fanciullino", whom adults, in contrast, tend to undervalue and ignore. Pascoli concludes that good literature is not derived from creative invention, but from a child-like rediscovery of the surrounding reality through a fantastic and imaginative lens (Castoldi, 2011).

By embracing Pascoli's theories, twilight authors rejected popular pedagogic models of the late nineteenth century that interpreted childhood as an undesirable stage of existence, to be controlled and shaped as soon as possible into an adult and socially useful form. Instead, twilight authors advanced an image of childhood as an enviable golden age characterized by immaculate innocence and unconditioned spontaneity. They advocated an educative path that accorded value and respect to a child's perceived desires, distinctive needs, limited experience and consequent immaturity. These were interpreted as conditions to nourish and to build upon harmoniously, rather than to deny and reprimand.

Many twilight writers endeavored to give a narrative body to the poetics of the "fanciullino". In their vision, children's reading should respect their ingenuous and incomplete representation of self and the world, and help them to make sense of societal mores and regulations. The twilight writers' works for children largely built on

situations of absolute serenity, aimed at mirroring the supposed purity of the infantile soul and at averting any sort of emotive disorders (Boero and De Luca, 2010).

Twilight children's literature presented, however, limits and misconceptions intrinsic to the authors' innovatory ambitions and to their romantic perception of the experience of childhood, originating from a degeneration of the myth of Pascoli's "fanciullino". In fact, twilight authors' image of childhood implied a moral obligation to protect children from worries and negative feelings. The narration thus appears to lead children readers through an initiation path in which any feelings or events that could potentially disrupt their serenity are ignored or denied. Moreover, among the exponents of the twilight movement adult authority was generally perceived as essential for a harmonic evolution from childhood to adulthood. Hence, their narrative voice was often heavily paternalistic and burdened by banalities, awkwardness, and melancholic or artificial tones. In particular, the invitation to lead a quiet life and resignedly accept the limitations of everyday life and one's own existential condition is recurrent and pedantic.

This is the case in Dino Provenzal's collection *I Cenci della Nonna* [Grandma's Rags], published in 1920. In Provenzal's stories, wondrous events are often used as a pretext to lead children readers towards a severe examination of their conscience, thus exposing the author's affected paternalistic voice. In *La Stella Nella Pozzanghera* (*The Star in the Puddle*), for example, the child protagonist Nella spots the sparkly reflection of a star in a muddy puddle. This observation leads Nella to think about her vanity: she embarks on a path of self-analysis, which leads her to search within herself for those faults that she blames in her classmates and to correct them (p.62).

*-Par strano che una stella si degni di far suo specchio una pozzanghera!  
Sarebbe come se noi, invece di specchiarci nei buoni, andassimo invece a  
scegliere i peggiori! [...] Ecco un'idea che non mi era venuta prima. Specchiarci  
in quelli che valgono meno di noi! E perche' no? Così' si studierebbero i difetti  
degli altri, e poi li cercheremo in noi stessi! [...]*

*A Nella, sebbene fosse la migliore scolara della classe, i difetti non mancavano.  
E via via, da quella Domenica in poi, lei ne scopri' sempre di nuovi,  
confrontandosi con le compagne meno buone. Poco tempo dopo, il suo carattere  
e la sua condotta erano mutati molto in meglio.*

[-How strange for a star to choose a puddle as a mirror! It is just as if instead of  
mirroring ourselves in the good people, we went looking for the bad ones! [...]  
Here is an idea I never had before: to compare myself in those who are less  
worthy than me! And why not? This way, I could study other people's faults and  
then look for them in myself.[...]

Nella, despite being the brightest girl in her class, was not short in faults. And  
little by little, from that Sunday on, she discovered many more by comparing  
herself with her less nice classmates. [...] After some time, her attitude and her  
behavior had greatly improved.]

Paternalistic attitudes towards the child reader such as this were intensified by the fact  
that twilight authors, particularly established writers of adult literature who chose to  
dedicate part of their work to children, tended to construct the image of the child they  
addressed on the basis of the nostalgic memories of their own childhood experience.

These memories were often extremely idealized. Moreover, their experience of childhood was very different from the one experienced by the child audience they were addressing, since the renewed attention to and progress of politics dedicated to children and their education had created a large generational gap between writers and readers. The result of the sum of these factors was a narrative stance only theoretically close to a child's sensibility and perception. In reality, it was often critically biased by a lack of regard for the existence of troubles, anxieties and moral dilemmas typical of the childhood condition, particularly its impulse to rebellion and contestation with authority.

Overall, however, twilight authors' experiments represented an important innovation for Italian children's literature. In fact, they deserve credit for considering children readers as their main interlocutors and as the receivers of specific texts, themes and languages, aimed at responding to their particular needs and limits. Their valorization of childhood experience concerned both the content and form of children's literature. It was expressed mainly through two genres of fiction: descriptions of daily life and the fantastical tale, both aimed at moving beyond the didactic and edifying narratives typical of nineteenth century Italian literature.

On the one hand, a new realist genre gained ground. It portrayed children's everyday lives in their familiar and emotional aspects, exalting the wonder of small things and the bliss of domestic serenity. Twilight authors cast a new light on common rituals and modest objects of daily life by observing them through a wondrous lens with which they aimed at adopting the point of view of the child reader. The narrative body of twilight realist children's book therefore attempts to mimetically reproduce external reality through literature intended to grasp and describe the simple, the authentic and the

uncontaminated, charging them with significance and symbolism. Ugo Ghiron offers an example of such realist narratives in the story in verses *La Granata* [The Broom], which belongs to *Sussurri* [Whispers] a collection of stories and poems published in 1920 that focuses on an emphatic praise of nature, domestic objects and familiar relationships. In this story, Ghiron reports an imaginary dialogue between a young girl and the broom she uses to clean her room, which exalts the value of the girl's modest contribution to daily housekeeping (p.13):

*Spazza, spazza la piccina/ e spazzando/ canta un canto lieve e blando/ alla buona granatina:/ -Granatina, granatina/ io ti voglio bene assai/ non lo sai? Chi fa linda la mattina/ chi fa linda in fretta in fretta/ la mia cameretta?/ Tu, mia bianca granatina!/ Chi ricerca ogni cantuccio della casa?/ Chi fa linda la cucina?/ Chi fa lustre mentre svelta/ scende e sale/ fin le scale?/ Tu, mia buona granatina!-.*

*Ma l'onesta/ la modesta granatina/ struscia e sfruscia, e par che dica/ alla piccola sua amica:/ -Grazie, si grazie padrona/ ma con me/ tu davvero sei troppo buona!/ Che farebbe, dimmi, senza/ quella tua saggia manina/ poverina/la tua bianca grantina?-.*

[The young girl sweeps and sweeps, and while sweeping, she sings a light song to her dear good little broom:/ -Oh broom, my little broom, I love you so much, do you know that?/ Who can make my tiny room clean, quickly quickly, every single morning?/ Only you can, my white little broom!/ Who can find every corner of the house?/ Who can make the kitchen clean?/ Who can make the stairs

look good,/ by going quickly/ up and down?/ Only you can, my dear little broom!!-

But the honest,/ wise little broom/ scrapes and brushes/ and seems to say to her dear young friend: /-Thank you, yes, thank you, my little mistress,/ but you are really too good with me!/ What would a poor little broom like me/ do without your wise tiny hands?-[

On the other hand, the fantastic and fairy-tale genre, which in the recent past had been accused of alienating children readers from reality by opening the way to foolish and ambiguous ideas, was revived and reinvigorated by twilight authors. They celebrated the fantastic as an ideal literary mode for responding to and nourishing children's creative perception of the world. This genre was proposed and diffused both through revisitations of the traditional fairy tale canon and through original creations. In an attempt to mirror and comply with the joyful and naïve astonishment of the child confronted with reality, the "new marvelous" described a strongly idealized world, where anxieties and ambiguities were mostly ignored, in favour of a clear distinction between good and bad. Amalia Guglielminetti exemplifies this genre in the story in verse *Il Castigo delle Stelle Curiose* [The Punishment of the Curious Stars], included in the collection *Le Fiabe in Versi* [Fairy tales in verses], published in 1921. Guglielminetti was a prolific and innovative author. Most of her work for adults focused on the condition of women, while her writings for children reflect the nonconformist aspect of her varied oeuvre. The protagonists of this story are a group of stars who embark on a journey to Earth. At the core of their adventures is their desire to understand and define human nature: they want to establish whether men are good or not. The stars are

encouraged through their encounters and their dialogue with inanimate objects to explore independently the various facets and complexities of the human soul and the beauty of the natural world (p.15).

*Chiese una stella: “E’ buona quella gente?”/ Ed i pioppi con gran perplessita’/ crollarono la testa lungamente:/ “C’e’ chi dice si, c’e’ chi dice no. Chi sa?” [...]*

*Un pioppo consiglio’: “Filate un volo, voi che potete, su la gran citta’./ Coi propri occhi, in un momento solo, si scopron bene molte verita’.”*

[A little star asked: “Are people in this world good?”/ The aspen trees bend their heads low, and they answered, perplexed: “Some say they are, some say they aren’t. Who knows?” [...]

An old aspen tree advised them: “Fly further on, since you can do that, further on towards the big town./ With your own eyes, in a glance, you will find out many truths”.]

This passage offers a paradigmatic example of the twilight authors’ typical linguistic register: their choice of vocabulary is close to oral expression and to common informal language. Figures of speech such as alliteration (pioppi, perplessita) and onomatopoeia (crollarono) contribute to render the language flow melodic and captivating. In fact, in parallel with these choices related to themes and genres, twilight authors attempted to revolutionize the traditional language of children’s books. They distinctly distanced themselves from the solemn register and artificial stylistic forms that had characterized the literary production dedicated to children in the previous century. Instead, spontaneity and immediacy characterized twilight authors’ linguistic register and their syntactic and

stylistic choices, which often acquired ludic potential. These authors drew on simple syntactic constructions, phono-symbolic materials such as onomatopoeia and alliteration, diminutives, intuitive neologisms, analogies, and imitations of infantile expressions through hypothetical baby-talk (Boero and De Luca, 2010).

In the best examples, these linguistic choices conferred liveliness and immediacy to the style and give incisiveness and fairy-tale colours to the narrative discourse. In less successful cases, the register often deteriorated through the use of excessively simplistic and puerile tones. However, all these choices contributed to the twilight celebration of children's spontaneously creative attitudes, in particular as storytellers and poets.

The circulation of twilight children's books during the Great War years and in the first post-war period represented an important alternative to patriotic literature. By safeguarding children's rights to dedicated readings, aimed at engaging with and nourishing their imagery and their language, twilight authors took a distinct stand against the contemporary progressive politicization of children's literature. In fact, by focusing on children's everyday life and interests, they implicitly criticized the premature patriotic engagement promoted by authors following official discourse. Similarly, their decision to adopt language aimed at replicating children's spontaneity contrasts starkly with the formality and pompousness that characterized a growing portion of contemporary children's literature.

Some twilight children's authors expressed more explicitly critical positions against the dominating ideology by confronting specific aspects of the themes of war and of the current social situation in their writings. Because of their violent and tragic



connotations, these subjects can seem distant from, if not contrary to, the twilight authors' ideological stance and promotion of childhood as an innocent and uncommitted age. However, twilight writers resolved this tension by using their works to expose children's confused and fearful perceptions of the conflict and the impact of the war on their everyday lives. They rejected the vision of the child's condition as an incomplete stage of existence, to be shaped as early as possible into a mature and socially useful form by precociously promoting values such as seriousness, spirit of sacrifice and responsibility. Instead, they indirectly criticized children's active involvement in the war effort and they defended the importance of safeguarding children's chance to experience childhood as an uncommitted age, despite contemporary political circumstances. Moreover, they aimed at offering child readers keys to interpret the events and consequences of the war, with the aim of helping them to rationalize their anxieties about the fighting and about the consequences of the conflict in their daily lives

For example, in Guglielminetti's collection *Fiabe in Versi* there is a series of four tales whose protagonist is Ondina, a child-fairy who lives on a rock and watches over the sea. In the last episode of this series, the young fairy befriends a group of enthusiastic young soldiers, who explain to her that there is a great war going on in the world (p.91)

*“Non sai che sulla terra c’e’ una grande battaglia,/ che mezzo il mondo contro  
l’altra meta’ si scaglia?*

*Anche noi combattiamo per la Patria bella/ e di lassu’ ci vigila la nostra bianca  
stella*

*Forse morremo tutti, ma che importa la morte/ quando la Patria e' grande,  
quando la Patria e' forte?"*

*"Dio mio", sospiro' Ondina, "Che cose strane e amare!/ Era meglio restarsene  
nascosti in fondo al mare*

[“Don’t you know that on Earth there is a great battle going on, that half of the  
world is fighting the other half?

We are fighting for our beautiful country too, and from the sky our white star  
watches on us.

We might all die, but who is afraid of death when the Fatherland is so great,  
when the Fatherland is so strong?”

“My God”, Ondina sighted,” So much weird and bitter news! I would rather  
have stayed hidden at the bottom of the sea.”]

In this passage, Ondina’s bafflement at the young soldiers’ enthusiasm for the conflict is evident; their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their country seems absurd to her. By shifting her omniscient narrator’s perspective to Ondina’s point of view, the author seems to interrogate her readers on the opportunity and significance of the human sacrifices required by the conflict. The conclusion of the tale, where Ondina witnesses the bombardment of the soldiers’ ship and their death, and cries until she dissolves into the seawater, reinforces the author’s message about the nonsensical and desperate nature of war.

The novel *Cenerella* [Cinderella] by Maria Messina, published in 1918, offers another example of criticism of war through twilight literature. The text describes the hardship experienced by a young Sicilian girl, Santina, known as Cinniredda, following the call to arms of her brother Domenico. In the absence of the only man in the family, Cinniredda's mother is forced to emigrate to America. Domenico is soon held prisoner by the Austrians, "like a robin inside the hat of a naughty boy" (p.15), and the girl protagonist must work as a maid in an aunt's house in Naples. The author was also a Sicilian novelist who had been forced to emigrate to Naples in her youth, therefore the novel draws on autobiographical elements. The character of Cinniredda, although inspired by Cinderella, loses any fairy tale attribute. Despite Cinniredda's profession of her belief in the patriotic cause, the main subject of the novel is the "sufferance without lights" (p.159) experienced by the girl because of the war. The denunciation of the privations inflicted on the working classes by the state of war and the nostalgia for peacetime is conveyed through informal, colloquial registers with occasional terms from Sicilian dialect, as in Domenico's mother's lament (p.14):

*"Io glielo dicevo. Perche' vuoi andare se non sei neppure di leva? E' vero, figlie mie, che gli dicevo cosi'? Il cuore mi parlava. Ed ecco che quella povera creatura, dopo essere stato sei mesi dentro le trincee, che, dicono, son proprio come le tane dei sorci, quella gente se l'e' preso..."*

[“I had warned him. Why do you want to enlist as a volunteer, you don't have to! Right, my girls, didn't I tell him so? My heart was talking to me. And now that poor creature, after spending six months in the trenches, which, as everybody knows, are just like rats' holes, now that people took him...”]

*The work of Arpalice Cuman Pertile as representative of twilight authors' resistance to the nationalistic appropriation of children's literature*

One author who adopted children's experience of war as a major theme was Arpalice Cuman Pertile. Her oeuvre offers a significant example of resistance to the nationalistic appropriation of Italian children's literature through narrative choices characteristic of the twilight movement.

Cuman Pertile was born in 1876 in Marostica (Vicenza). In her autobiography *Le Memorie di Due Cuori* [Memories of Two Hearts], published in 1954, she describes how the social unrest and class tensions which had characterized her youth gradually shaped her aversion to conflicts and her aspiration to ideals of universal peace and solidarity. In her autobiography, she declared that she had "sworn war to the war" as a young woman (p.36), and throughout her life she demonstrated a pacifist but passionate commitment to her humanitarian ideals, both as a writer and an educator. In fact, along with her work as teacher and children's author, Cuman Pertile was consistently engaged in social issues such as the organization of an education system able to reach the working classes, or the defense of the earliest trade unions.

Following the advent of the First World War, Cuman Pertile declared herself against Italy's intervention and sided publicly with the neutralists. She was consequently accused of being unpatriotic, lost her teaching position, and was forced to leave the town of Vicenza. During her forced exile, she began her career as an author of prose and poetry dedicated to children, aimed at both personal and scholastic use. After the end of

the war, she returned to Vicenza, where she resumed her job as teacher as well as her pacifist campaign. However, with the establishment of the fascist regime, Cuman Pertile was once again exiled from teaching and her texts were banned from schools. Nevertheless, she pursued her writing career, and remained an important presence in Italian children's culture until her death in 1958 (Giolo, 2012).

Cuman Pertile's prolific work as a children's author reflects her social engagement and her ideals. Her critical attitude toward the interventionist argument and her appeal against the allure of war are particularly explicit in the novel *Ninetta e Tirintin* [Ninetta and Tirintin], published in 1918. The main stylistic and thematic narrative features of this text reflect those of the twilight genre. However, when confronting the themes of war and defending her pacifist position, Cuman Pertile resorts to creative and effective narrative inventions.

The novel is based on the vicissitudes of two tiny rag dolls tied together by a wool thread, made by Mamma Itala for her daughter Rita. In the first half of the novel, they explore the environment and the inhabitants of the vegetable garden where they live, under the care of the young Rita. Suddenly, though, their serene and playful existence is troubled by the news of the hospitalization of Rita's brother Gianni, a soldier who has been wounded during a battle. To cheer Gianni up, Rita gives him her two dolls. Thus Ninetta and Tirintin, while being kept safe in a pocket of Gianni's uniform, become observers and witnesses of the soldiers' conditions in the military hospital and later of Gianni's return to the front, his battles, and the final victory.

Many narrative features identify this novel as belonging to the twilight genre, especially Cuman Pertile's image of childhood as portrayed through the characters of Ninetta and Tirintin. She describes them as tiny and delicate beings, sometimes bashful and sensitive, at other times curious and impertinent. The dolls' feelings are always pure and innocent, and they are able to follow their idealistic and generous impulses with a genuine passion. This is evident after Ninetta risks her life to save Tirintin from the wind, and Tirintin remarks, "You are afraid of everything, and yet you run to save me without thinking twice!" (p.9).

Cuman Pertile's portrayal of the relationship between children and their educators, which is conveyed through her description of the dolls' relationship with Rita, also reflects the twilight philosophy of pedagogy. The educator's authority is described as unquestionable, and the limitations imposed on the Ninetta and Tirintin's free will are considered by the dolls as valuable advice. Ninetta and Tirintin are dependent on Rita's cures and her decisions, and this relation requires their absolute trust and obedience. Occasionally, the dolls struggle between their desire to satisfy Rita and to follow their own will. However, these struggles are always resolved with an act of resigned obedience. This is the case when Rita puts the dolls to bed despite their desire to play longer (p.21):

*-Io non vorrei andare a letto ora...Ma siamo piccoli e non conosciamo il mondo.  
Meglio obbedire: i grandi ne sanno piu' di noi -*

[I don't want to go to bed right now... But we are only little, and we don't know anything about the world. We'd better obey: grown-ups know better than us.-]

The settings of the novel are typical of those in the everyday life of a child of the working class: the house, the school, the vegetable garden. Through the dolls' childlike viewpoint, however, these familiar places acquire a wondrous and mystic aura. Everything appears gigantic, enchanting or terrifying to the amazed eyes of Ninetta and Tirintin: a bat becomes a black ogre; a cricket a little devil with horns, and a butterfly a golden winged fairy. Their interpretation of reality thus reflects Pascoli's *fanciullino's* peculiar capacity of finding deep truths or meaning in simple situations.

However, Cuman Pertile demonstrates an ability to move beyond the sentimentalism and paternalism typical of the twilight novel, and introduces creative and incisive narrative elements, in particular when aiming to promote her humanitarian cause. For example, the wool thread which keeps Ninetta and Tirintin together acquires a crucial value. It saves the dolls' lives when they are threatened by the wind; when it is broken, the separated dolls face extreme dangers; and, later in the novel, it protects Gianni from being hit by a bullet during a battle. These events inspire the dolls to observe: "In this life, we really have to be united to help each other" (p.10), "When we are united, playing is more fun" (p.13), and "Obviously, fighting is bad" (p.18). Hence the thread becomes a symbol of the author's message concerning the necessity of reciprocal solidarity and cooperation between people.

By dealing with the themes of the war and the contemporary political situation in the second half of the novel, Cuman Pertile uncovers further opportunities to convey her humanitarian ideals and her disagreement with the nationalist and martial discourse. The novel becomes a vehicle for expressing her skepticism about the reasons for the war and her exposure of its somber consequences.

Her description of the First World War is focused not on the fighting as much as on its effects on both soldiers and civilians. Against the illusions of the war conveyed by official discourse, Cuman Pertile opposes a fervent appeal to end the suffering, destruction and slaughter caused by the conflict. Mamma Itala explains to her daughter that fighting a war means “to suffer and to kill, which are both nasty affairs” (p.90). Later in the novel, Ninetta and Tirintin’s enthusiasm for Italy’s final victory is immediately dampened when they witness the devastation of villages and households close to the front (p.87):

*Intanto l’aereoplano passava proprio sopra i tetti. E allora i bambolini videro dei comignoli rovesciati che non fumavano piu’, e delle case scoperchiata che lasciavano vedere le stanze mezzo distrutte; videro un campanile senza campane, e tutta una contrada di rovine. Ninetta pianse.*

[In the meantime the airplane was flying right above the roofs. Then the dolls saw chimney pots turned upside-down, which did not smoke anymore, and houses which had lost their roofs so they could see their wrecked rooms; they saw a bell tower without bells, and a whole village in ruins. Ninetta cried.]

Cuman Pertile’s description of the conflict thus acknowledges sorrow and despair, yet it remains full of hope and solidarity. Tirintin encourages a distraught Ninetta to look forward to the reconstruction and to a peaceful future (p.88):

*-E allora non la voglio piu’ la Guerra, mai piu’!-*



*Tirintin la conforto': -Intanto questa e' finita, non vedi? E' finita bene! Speriamo che si l'ultima! Presto ci sara' la pace. Gianni tornera' a casa sua... E noi con lui!-*

[-Then I don't want any more war, never again!-

Tirintin comforted her: -For now, this one is ended, can't you see? And it's ended well! Let's hope that this is the last one! Soon there will be peace. Gianni will go back home, and we will go back with him.-]

Thus the victorious conclusion of the war loses the intrinsic value given by the dominant ideology, which celebrated it as proof of national superiority over other countries and as a means to territorial expansion (Isnenghi, 2002). In *Ninetta e Tirintin* the victory is instead only valuable as an ending to soldiers and civilians' suffering and as a promise of definitive peace.

Likewise, the character of the soldier as conveyed through Gianni challenges the icon of the invincible warrior and indomitable martyr promulgated by the dominant discourse. Cuman Pertile describes the soldier Gianni as an individual with his own limits and fears, terrified by the fighting, nostalgic for his family, and fragile and lonely during his hospitalization in a military institution. Gianni is initially shown as a frightened boy, who finds courage in the photos of his sister and her dolls. Yet, when he is called to fight on the front, he does not draw back, but keeps his engagement with his fellow soldiers. At the conclusion of a battle, one of Gianni's companions points out the similarities between their condition as soldiers and the dolls (p.82):

*-Gia', in guerra siamo tutti sospesi ad un filo, come i due piccini: se si spezza, buonanotte!-*

-In war we all hang by a thread, just like these two little ones [the dolls]: if it breaks, goodnight!-

Cuman Pertile's interpretation of a child's perspective on the conflict is conveyed through the eyes of Ninetta and Tirintin. When faced with the realities of the war, the dolls express a mixture of feelings. On the one hand, they appear eager to understand the current political events and the reasons for the fighting, and they are frustrated by their inability to interpret adults' opinions and conversations. This is the case when the dolls meet Gianni at the military hospital and they hear him describing the war to his mother (p.70).

*Segui' un parlare sommesso come di due cuori vicini, che avessero tanti segreti da confidarsi. I bambolini ascoltavano... ma non capivano che le parole: "pace, Italia, guerra, morti, feriti".*

[They spoke in low voices, as if their hearts had many secrets to confide. The dolls were listening... but they could only understand the words: "peace, Italy, war, deaths, wounded".]

On the other hand, the dolls register sadness and fear when they witness the violence of the fighting on the front or the suffering of the wounded soldiers in the military hospital. Cuman Pertile tries to satisfy her child readers' eagerness to understand the reasons and effects of the war without magnifying their fears. To this end, she keeps Ninetta and

Tirintin hidden in Gianni's wallet, so their experience of the war is mainly an auditory rather than a visual one.

*Così i bambolini andarono alla battaglia. Chiusi là dentro, non videro nulla, ma udirono un rumore assordante di cannoni, di mitragliatrici, di fucili, una tempesta di proiettili, un gemere da far pietà. Sentirono Gianni muoversi affannosamente a destra, a sinistra, avanti, indietro, gettarsi a terra, rialzarsi, sparare... e il suo cuore buono battere come un martello. [...]*

*Poi udirono un comando: - Cessate il fuoco! -. Quasi subito il fragore infernale di cannoni, di mitragliatrici, di fucili tacque; ma si levò un gran gemere di feriti.*

[So the dolls went to the battle. Being hidden there [in Gianni's pocket], they did not see anything, but they heard a deafening noise of cannons, of machine-guns, of rifles, a storm of bullets, a pitiful groaning. They heard Gianni moving frantically left and right, forward, backward, throwing himself down, standing up again, shooting... and they heard his good heart banging like a hammer. [...]

Then they heard an order: -Cease fire!-. Almost instantly the infernal din of guns, of machine-guns, of rifles stopped; but then the loud moaning of the wounded increased.]

This passage (p.80) exemplifies how the dolls' auditory perception of the battle conveys the chaos and tragedy of the war, while leaving aside excessive violence. The description of Gianni's rapid and frantic sequence of movements on the battlefield, as well as the simile between his heartbeat and a hammer, evoke the anxious and horrific aspect of the battle. The most violent and gruesome aspects of the fight are however

hidden from the dolls's sight, thus leading children readers to a realistic yet non-threatening awareness of the conflict.

Therefore, when describing the war, Cuman Pertile leaves aside the sentimentalism characteristic of the twilight genre. Instead, through the detailed description of the battle soundscape, she lets the war speak for itself, in a way accessible to children. This narrative strategy also conveys the author's opinion about the tragic nature of a conflict which does not require her to add any element of sadness or horror to reveal its tragedy.

The novel ends with a hopeful appeal to universal peace conveyed through an allegorical tale told by mamma Itala to Rita and her dolls. The protagonists of this short story are Ninetta and Tirintin themselves; the dolls are engaged in a quest to find the Peace Fairy and ask her to guarantee definitive peace all over the world. When the dolls find the fairy, she explains to them that, in order to restore universal peace, they must tie the golden thread which keeps together the many threads of the world's nations, which have become unlaced. The dolls succeed in fastening all the threads back to the golden one. Afterwards, the Peace Fairy and "the important people from all over the world" declare their commitment to assuring universal peace. The dolls celebrate the success of their quest with an emphatic song (p.103):

*Noi siamo fatti a fili a fili/ Tirintin si si si*

*Anche il mondo e' tutto a fili/ Tirintin si si si*

*Ma ci vuole un filo solo/ che li tenga sempre uniti/ Tirintin si si si*

*Perche' allora, allora solo/ tanti guai saranno finiti:*

*un sol filo tutto d'or/ il gran filo dell'amor*

[We are made of many threads/ Tirintin yes yes yes

The world is also made by many threads/ Tirintin yes yes yes

But we need one and only one thread /to keep them all together/ Tirintin yes yes  
yes

Because then, just then, all our troubles will come to an end:

One only thread, a golden one, the thread of love]

The golden thread fastening together the world's nations appears thus as an effective allegory which expresses Cuman Pertile's opinion about the necessity to educate future generations to ideals of pacifism and mutual cooperation.

This direct confrontation with the subjects of war and children's involvement with contemporary politics appears elsewhere in Cuman Pertile's oeuvre. Similar themes appear, for example, in *Riccioli d'Oro* [Goldilocks], a story included in the collection *Fra Canti, Balli, Fiori e Ghirlandelle* [Among Songs, Dances, Flowers and Garlands], published in 1921. This story revolves on the vicissitudes of the Bolini family, whose father is called to arms. In his absence, his wife and seven young children survive in conditions of misery and economic struggle. The splendid blonde hair of Rinuccia, the youngest daughter, is their only solace.

The life conditions of the young family worsen with the news of the father's apparent death. While working in the fields to earn their living, the family meets an Austrian prisoner of war forced to help with the harvesting. The Austrian soldier recognizes the

Bolini children and claims to have met their father. During a frontal attack on the Alps, the Austrian soldier and the Bolini father had allowed each other a momentary truce to kiss their children's photos for the last time. The two soldiers consequently realize that they both had seven children, and recognized the same misery and emotional pain in each other. Overwhelmed by this recognition, they had laid down their arms, and were subsequently both made prisoners by the opposite army. The Austrian soldier's account rekindles the Bolini children's hope of seeing their father again. After a few months, they receive a postcard which confirms that he is a prisoner of war in Austria. At the end of the conflict, the family is finally reunited in a military hospital, where the father is recovering from the hardships of his imprisonment.

As in *Ninetta e Tirintin*, the departure of the soldier for the front in this story completely contradicts the enthusiasm and optimism assigned to it by patriotic discourse. Instead, the Bolini father's call to arms is "like a sentence" which triggers "unsustainable suffering" (p.252). Cuman Pertile exposes the effects of the conflict on the household, both from an emotional and economic perspective. Mother and children ask themselves,

*"Oh, ma chi ha inventato la guerra? Quello non pensava ai bambini che restano soli! Quello non aveva ne' madre ne' sposa ne' figli; era nato nelle selve e aveva un cuore di tigre."*

"Oh, but who has invented the war? That man was not thinking about the children who are left alone! That man did not have a mother or a spouse or children; he must have been born in the jungle and he must have had a tiger's heart."

Cuman Pertile further extends her denunciation of the war to its economic consequences for small peasant communities like that of the Bolini family. In fact, while “young men’s strong arms are busy dealing with rifles, cannons and machine-guns” (p.261), the entire community risks losing the harvest and suffering from hunger. To avert this risk, even the youngest Bolini children are forced to help with harvesting the wheat.

Furthermore, Cuman Pertile’s description of the enemy soldier in this story sharply contrasts with that of the dominant ideology. In fact, the author avoids any attitude of condemnation or derision. Instead, her narrative highlights the similarities between the opposite armies, in particular the soldiers’ loneliness, weariness and homesickness. To the eyes of the Bolini children, who observe the war prisoners taking their father’s place in the fields, the enemy soldiers appear pallid and weak. Their perception of the misery of the Austrian prisoners reads as a veiled hint of the suffering endured by Italian soldiers (p.264):

*Sui loro volti si leggeva il pensiero dei cari lontani che pativano tutte le orrende privazioni della guerra, schiavi dell’imperatore e dei ricchi signori, che pel loro interesse li avevano cacciati in una lotta infame.*

[On their faces they could read their worries about their far-away families, who were suffering all the horrible deprivations of the war, slaves of the emperor and of rich men, who had thrown them into a vile fight just for their own interests.]

The Austrian prisoner’s account of his encounter with the Bolini father at the front appears as a condemnation of the absurdity of the war (p.261):

*“Eravamo stanchi, arrabbiati, furibondi e stavamo per ucciderci. Sì, volevo fargli pagare cara la mia condanna. Avevo dovuto lasciare i miei figliuoli senza pane e senza aiuto, e da tanti mesi durava il mio martirio. Egli doveva avere lo stesso pensiero, perche’ mi guardava bieco e e masticava parole che io non comprendevo, ma che dovevano essere ingiurie e maledizioni. Tenevamo sospese le armi furiosamente... chi ci soffiasse nelle vene quell’odio bestiale, io non so...”*

[“We were tired, angry, furious and we were about to kill each other. Yes, I wanted him to pay me back for my sentence. I had left my children without bread and without help, and my torment had already lasted many months. He must have thought the same, because he had a nasty look and he was muttering words that I could not understand, but which must have been insults and curses. We were holding our weapons over each other with fury ... I have been wondering who was blowing into our veins such a beastly hate...”]

The two soldiers then discover that they both a wife and seven children waiting for them, which reads as an appeal to recognize the similarities between men of all nations (p.270):

*“Allora vi confesso, piangemmo come bambini e ci abbracciammo. Era buono quell’italiano, buono come questo grano; era un uomo, un padre, e aveva sette figliuoli anche lui.”*



[“Then I must confess to you that we cried like children and we hugged each other. That Italian man was good, good as this wheat; he was a man, a father, and he had seven young children just like me”]

The credibility of the description of the child’s perspective on the war is reinforced through a letter written by the oldest Bolini boy, Nanni, at the news of his father’s apparent death. While pleading to the committee for missing soldiers to keep searching for him, Nanni expresses his deep discontent with the conditions into which his family has been led by the absence of his father and his worries about his family’s future.

The comparison between Cuman Pertile’s twilight narratives and verist war literature discussed in the first chapter of this thesis highlights some similarities, namely a recurrent resort to sentimentalist and pathetic tones. Also, both twilight and verist authors put the portrayal of domestic environment and children’s everyday life at the heart of their narratives. However, Cuman Pertile’s child protagonists represent in many ways the antithesis to the young characters of verist literature. Young protagonists such as Ninetta and Tirintin or Nanni Bolini reject the enthusiastic and unquestioning support to the patriotic cause professed by Teresah’s Pasqualino or Haidee’s Giusto. Instead, their perspective on the war highlights the most absurd and cruel aspects of the conflict, and their reflections bring to the fore the need to respect and value the lives of individual soldiers and their families. This is evident, for example, in Ninetta’s expression of her doubts and fears when faced with the vision of the desolation of bombed towns.

Cuman Pertile’s child protagonists are particularly effective in exposing the consequences of the conflict for everyday family life. For her young characters, the

sacrifice and personal involvement with the war do not coincide with the relinquishment of a small treat, such as a sweet or a trip to the movies, as was the case for the boy protagonist of Lupati's short story. Instead, they suffer much more demanding privations; for example, the Bolini children experience hunger and they are forced to work in the fields in order to support their family rather than playing.

Most importantly, instead of being subordinated to the patriotic cause, Cuman Pertile's child characters' personalities are developed in contrast to the messages of official discourse. The war has a crucial impact on their construction of selfhood. Ninetta is forced to overcome her shyness and become aware of the destruction and suffering related to the conflict. Nanni Bolini must grow up to compensate for the absence of his father, both from a moral and a practical point of view. Thus, both child characters transition from a condition of infantile egocentrism towards maturing social awareness.

Cuman Pertile therefore offers in both *Ninetta e Tirintin* and *Riccioli d'Oro* a convincing critique of the stereotypes related to the First World War, particularly the figures of the soldier and the Italian child idealized by contemporary official discourse, which would later be promulgated by the fascist party. Therefore, she can be classified with those authors who recognized in these stereotypes an excess of patriotism, and who tried to offer to their child readers an alternative and more balanced point of view.

*The influence of the comical and satirical current on the development of the image of childhood and of children's literature in the early twentieth century*

In parallel with the somber and edifying readings proposed by children's literature on war and with the sentimentalism and conciliatory attitude characteristic of many twilight works, a school of authors embracing humour as a means of exploring the childhood experience gained ground in Italy in the first two decades of the twentieth century. The exponents of this genre attempted to overcome the pedagogic zeal that characterized and limited the majority of contemporary children's literature by adopting an ironic and burlesque stance, which they interpreted as consonant with the sensibility of the child reader.

Like the twilight current, the comic and satirical genre originated from a discontent with the values perpetuated by the pedagogic philosophies of the late nineteenth century, which criticized humour in children's literature as a manifestation of moral decay and deviation from an austere formative path (Boero and De Luca, 2010). Moreover, the publication at both a European and national level of philosophical and literary treatises reassessing the nature of humour at the beginning of the twentieth century fuelled the development of the comical and satirical genre in children's literature (Colin, 2005). For example, Henry Bergson's essay *Laughter. An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900) promoted the role of humour as a source of knowledge rather than a diversion from an educational path, thereby offering a theoretical foundation for the development of literature for children based on humour. In Italy this current of thought found an illustrious exponent in Luigi Pirandello, a renowned novelist and playwright. Pirandello's narrative and theatrical oeuvre was characterized by a consistent use of

derisory and disillusioned tones, used as a means to expose crucial themes. In particular, in the essay *L'Umoreismo (The Humour)*, published in 1908, he criticised the description of human experience using only the codes of moralist and sentimentalist literature. Instead, he promoted the advent of a satirical and antihierarchical genre as the only literary expression able to convey the inauthenticity of social conventions and the relativity of man's identity and destiny (Caputi, 1988).

Many authors of children's literature operating in the first decades of the twentieth century welcomed this emergent philosophical and pedagogical orientation towards humour by creating a new literary genre, which included poetry, novels and illustrated stories in verse. Up to that point, humour had been a rarity in Italian children's literature. Despite important exceptions, such as *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (whose innovative and satirical aspects might be largely related to Carlo Collodi's background as a journalist), comical and satirical literature were not part of mainstream children's literature in the nineteenth century.

The new genre was based on a valorization of the bizarre and unusual, as well as on a debunking of traditional narrative structures and themes. In an attempt to respond to the desire to laugh and have fun which they perceived as intrinsic to childhood, children's authors mocked the edifying and sentimental literary tradition by introducing innovative stylistic and narrative elements. Similarly to twilight literature, comical and satirical narratives are mostly based on everyday situations or on motifs of the traditional fairy tale canon. However, instead of idealizing the most pathetic aspects of the human experience, they highlight its absurdities through desecrating language, rich in word play, nonsense and original thematic inventions.

The enjoyment of the absurd and the reversal of clichés result in bizarre and surreal situations. This is the case, for example, in *La Storia dell'Ochina Nera* [The Story of the Black Goose], written by Carola Prosperi in 1921. The text is a collection of stories parodying the main motifs of the Mother Goose tradition of fairy tales and nursery rhymes. In Prosperi's rewriting of the fairy tale canon, the fantastic element is strongly reappraised in favour of amusing and irreverent details. For instance *La Reginotta Sbadiglia* [The Yawning Little Queen] is a parody of the Sleeping Beauty, in which the description of the protagonist is more akin to a lazy adolescent than a royal character. When a prince finally appears to rescue her, the whole court breaks with etiquette, as well as the reader's expectations, by beginning to yawn uncontrollably (p.261):

*Il re, la regina, il principe del Portogallo, le dame, i cortigiani, poi tutti quanti.  
Tutti in coro: Iiii!...Aaaaa!... Non si era mai visto un tale scandalo.*

[The king, the queen, the prince of Portugal, the ladies-in-waiting, the courtiers, and then everyone else. All together in a choir: Iiii!...Aaaa! Such a scandal had never been seen.]

The funny, odd and sometimes grotesque characters of such comical and satirical narratives are generally devoid of any moralistic and idealistic connotations. Instead, their paradoxical behaviour tends to highlight the absurdity of such morals. The protagonist of the novel *Viperetta* [Little Viper], written by Antonio Rubino in 1919, exemplifies this reversal of the traditional paradigms of children's literature. The novel is structured as a bildungsroman in which the young girl protagonist grows out of her rebellious nature and excitable temper through a journey of initiation during which she

meets a series of improbable mentors. Those who should serve as her educators are consistently undermined by Viperetta's intransigence and spirit of contradiction.

*Il primo [pedagogo] incomincio': - La presunzione (dal latino presumere) e' quella cosa, la quale fa si' che quanto meno uno sa, piu' si crede di sapere, quanto meno uno vale, piu' si crede valere. Tale soverchia opinione di se' e' caratteristica delle giovani menti, le quali in gran conto tengono se' stesse e per nulla si curano di chi le supera vuoi per vastita' di sapere, vuoi per maturita' di senno e di consiglio.*

*Viperetta sbadiglio' e s'incammino' per uscire.*

*-Fermati, sciagurata! Dove vai?- Le chiesero i tre[pedagoghi] ad una voce.*

*-Vado in giardino a giocare.*

*-Oibo'! Nessun gioco e' bello, se non e' preceduto dallo studio, cosi' come nessuna gioia e' grande, se non e' purificata dal sapere.*

*-Che barba!- esclamo' Viperetta. [...]*

*-Fanciulla! Il tuo contegno ci dimostra come il tuo intelletto sia manchevole e come sia scarsa in te la sete dello scibile.*

*-Non ho sete, ma in compenso ho un appetito del diavolo- rispose la bimba pronta.*

[The first [pedagogue] began: - With the word presumption (from the Latin *presumere*) we identify that thing by which the less one knows, the more he

thinks he knows, the less one is worth, the more he thinks himself worthy. Such an excessive opinion of self is characteristic of young minds, which have great self-esteem and do not pay enough attention to those who outweigh them in terms of the extent of their learning, or maturity of age or of wisdom.

Viperetta yawned and began to walk away.

-Stop, you scoundrel! Where are you going?- asked the three [pedagogues] all together.

-I am going to play in the garden.

-Now then! Playing cannot be fun, if it is not preceded by studying; likewise, no joy can be great, if it is not purified by knowledge.

-How dull!- exclaimed Viperetta.[...]

-Young lady! Your behaviour shows us how faulty your intellect is, and how scarce is your thirst for knowledge.

-I am not that thirsty, but I have a hell of an appetite- the girl answered promptly.

This passage (p.80) exemplifies the literary devices through which the author uncovers the pettiness behind Viperetta's mentors' solemn and pompous attitudes. The stark opposition between their redundant language and her straightforward answers, as well as the tongue-in-cheek word play with which Viperetta responds to their appeal to her thirst for knowledge, are evident and memorable. They convey a clear message about the relativity of authoritative figures' self-consequence; they promote a curious and critical approach to their absolute truths.

The implied reader conveyed by the authors of the comical and satirical genre is therefore a curious and perceptive child, endowed with a sharp spirit of observation and criticism. In fact, their narratives do not simply invite child readers to laugh, but they also lead them towards a comparison between reality and the absurd which highlights many relativistic and paradoxical aspects of the human experience. Thus, these authors tend to adopt humour as an instrument to foster in their infantile audience a critical stance able to overcome appearances and expose hypocrisies.

Comical and satirical children's literature is not exempt from some limits, which derive from an issue of children's accessibility to the discourse and narrative codes characteristic of the genre. These codes are sometimes beyond the linguistic and cognitive reach of child readers. For example, in some narratives the linguistic registers appear too complex to be appreciated by a juvenile audience. Similarly, imagery and cultural references can at times be challenging. Moreover, the skepticism, lack of ideals and the pessimism about men's fate expressed by some authors of this genre are sometimes inadequate to the sensibilities of young readers. Therefore, in some cases, it seems plausible to identify among the comical and satirical authors a willingness to address an implied double audience: the partial insensitivity of the authors of this genre towards the cognitive capacities of their child audience could result from their desire to reach adult readers too.

This is the case, for example, in Gian Bistolfi, author of many collections of short stories for children. The stories that he wrote during the first years of the Great War are based on literary interpretations of figures of speech, which create incongruous and comical situations. After the conflict, however, Bistolfi's grotesque stories acquired a somber



and pessimistic aspect. For examples, in *L' Avventurissima e altre Storie Quasi Straordinarie per Fanciulli* [The Great Adventure and Other Almost Extraordinary Stories for Children], published in 1919, he mocks a poor man who relinquishes a piece of bread in order to be allowed to sniff the good smells coming from a butcher's shop window. In another story, he describes how a group of crabs find a way to become rich by cheating a whale. Those late stories seem therefore aimed not just at entertaining, but also at expressing the author's distrust of mankind; the use of moral allegories such as the ones described above might represent his intention to communicate his unease to both adult and child readers.

Despite these limits, comical and satirical children's literature retains the merit of having demonstrated a significant respect for the child readers' interests and enjoyment, which represented an important innovation in the history of Italian children's literature. By rejecting pretensions of moralism and forced innocence, and valuing the fantastic and absurd element, exponents of this current managed to overcome the patronizing and didactic tradition. However, the genre was destined to gradually disappear in parallel with the establishment of the fascist culture in the Ventennio. In fact, the mocking and anti-establishment stance of the authors of this genre turned out to be incompatible with the paternalist, celebrative literature for children promoted by the fascist regime, as well as potentially corrosive of its ideology and customs.

As was the case with the twilight authors, the critical and caustic orientation of the authors of the comical and satirical genre is evident in many works dealing with the subject of war. In fact, many authors adopted a skeptical and anti-celebratory point of view on the conflict and the soldier's experience of war. Thus, they placed themselves in

marked contrast with the edifying and sacralizing interpretation of the Great War operated by the contemporary dominant ideology and subsequently reinforced by the earlier fascist pedagogues in the first post-war years. In many cases, the treatment of the war transforms their cheerful and uncommitted narratives into allegories which expose bitter truths, such as the absurd and inconclusive aspects of all conflicts or the dubious value of the soldier's sacrifice.

This is the case in the work of Sto [Sergio Tofano], a prolific writer and illustrator, widely acknowledged as one of the most successful exponents of comical and satirical children's literature in the first decades of the twentieth century. The elegant style and original inventions which characterize his narrative production assume an anarchic and irreverent connotation when he deals with war-related themes. Tragic subjects such as the soldier's loss of identity or the suffering of the mutilated are reinterpreted through absurd and grotesque characters. Ugaccion della Stagnola, for example, protagonist of *Ugaccion della Stagnola Invincibile Capitano Prigioniero di Se' Stesso* [Huge Hugo McFoil Unconquerable Captain Prisoner of Himself], a story which belongs to the collection *I Cavoli a Merenda* [Cabbages for Tea], is a knight who is repeatedly entrapped in his armour in a series of unfortunate accidents. His armour ends up defining his identity, to the point that he becomes reluctant to leave it. His situation reads as a metaphor of the uniform of the soldier at war, which cancels his own identity, needs and desires in favour of the "supreme cause" it represents. The reassurance and the effacement of the self provided by the uniform thus becomes a trap that is hard to escape.

Sto explores further the condition of the soldier at war through the character of Cecco, protagonist of *La Dolorosa e Commovente Istoria di Cecco e Rosina* [The Sorrowful and Moving Story of Cecco and Rosina], included in the collection *Storie di Cantastorie* [Storytellers' Stories]. Cecco offers an incisive caricature of the character of the soldier promoted by official discourse. In fact, his "exemplary discipline coupled with great courage" (p.10) translates itself in his absolute subordination to his superiors' orders and his incapacity for understanding the gravity of the situations and the dangers to which he is exposed. Even the tragedy of mutilation is presented through a surreal and mocking register. During the fighting on the battlefield, private Cecco receives an unusual wound: a bullet pierces his head from side to side, so that his superiors' commands "enter through one ear, and go out through the other one" (p.11). Cecco's misery is solved by an officer who, after ordering him to attack the enemy trench, plugs his ears with two corks: Cecco is thus able to retain the order and successfully accomplish it.

Similarly critical and scornful reflections on the subject of war appear in the short play *Guerra Topicida. Tragedia in Tre Atti e Molte Centinaia di Topi Morti* [The Micekiller War. A Tragedy in Three Acts and Many Hundreds of Dead Mice], a short play published in the magazine *Il Corriere dei Piccoli* on the 1st November 1914, written by Theo and illustrated by Rubino. The play describes a ludicrous albeit bloody war between two armies of mice fighting with nails and beans for the control of the granary. The war ends in slaughter on both sides, and the sole surviving mouse denounces the cruelty and pointlessness of the massacre by commenting (p.11):

*Ed ora? A quale scopo si e' tanto combattuto, versando tanto sangue? Chi la vittoria ha avuto? Nessuno! Che' il granaio resta sempre li' intatto e in si' tremanda zuffa, chi ci guadagna e' il gatto!*

[What now? What was the purpose of all this fighting, of all this butchery? Who did win? Nobody! The granary is still there intact, and the only one who gains something from such a horrible fight is the cat!]

*The work of Collodi Nipote as representative of comical and satirical authors' criticism of the politicization of children's literature*

With the novel *Il Cuore di Pinocchio* [The Heart of Pinocchio], published in 1917, the author known as Collodi Nipote builds on literary features distinctive of the comical and satirical genre to create an effective example of a critical and subversive position against the contemporary dominating ideology and the politicization of children's literature. Collodi Nipote was a literary pseudonym chosen by Paolo Lorenzini, nephew of the author of *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, presumably with the intention of attracting some of his uncle's literary fame. In fact, Collodi Nipote, who was born in Florence in 1876, achieved neither the literary quality nor the success of Carlo Collodi. However, he experienced an adventurous life and a long and diversified career as an author of prose and poetry for children and adults, a director of children's magazines, a radio broadcaster and even a ghost-writer for Emilio Salgari's unfinished novels (Levi, 2012).

Collodi Nipote's prolific work as children's novelist is characterized by a skeptical and irreverent stance, resulting from his dissatisfaction with contemporary sociocultural

structures and values (Boero and De Luca, 2010). Indeed, some of his novels are valuable as historical documents of the social changes and political tensions that characterized the period in which they were written. For example, Collodi Nipote's experience as a young working-class emigrant to Argentina at the beginning of the twentieth century is illustrated in the trilogy of Chifellino (*Le Avventure di Chifellino*, 1901. *Il Testamento di Berlingaccio*, 1903. *Chitarrino e Tirindello*, 1906). While describing the young protagonists' adventures and encounters in a foreign land, these novels expose the betrayed hopes of the emigration promise and the emigrants' effectively miserable life conditions. Collodi Nipote denounces the political and economic causes which led to the emigration phenomenon, and he expresses bitterness and resentment towards the Italian authorities.

Similar expressions of disappointment with contemporary society and humanity's future appear in his most popular children's novel, *Sussi e Biribissi* [Sussi and Biribissi], published in 1902, written as a satirical transposition of Jules Verne's adventure novels. Sussi and Biribissi's voyage towards the centre of the Earth in fact leads them to an exploration of the sewerage of Florence and to many encounters with surreal human and animal characters that inhabit this underground "world". The boys become so knowledgeable about the sewage system that they end up finding jobs as an inspector of underground works and a sewage operator. This transposition of the mythical exploration journey into the sewers confirms the skeptical and polemic attitude of the author towards modernism and humanity's future. Moreover, he expresses his criticism of authorities such as the church through incisive, satirical characters. His stance is, however, expressed through original and grotesque characters and vicissitudes, and

through a lively and comical linguistic register, all of which reveal the harsh reality of modern life in a desecrating manner. In his satire on social institutions, Collodi Nipote appears as the spiritual heir of his uncle Carlo Collodi, who, fifty years before the publication of *Il Cuore di Pinocchio*, had introduced powerful metaphors and moral allegories to criticize authorities in children's literature, thus demonstrating remarkable originality and anti-conformism.

With the novel *Il Cuore di Pinocchio*, Collodi Nipote applies his skeptical and polemical viewpoint to the events of the First World War. The narrative is constructed as a reverse initiation novel. It begins in fact where the original *Adventures of Pinocchio* ended: the protagonist has succeeded in becoming a real boy. He resolves then to participate in the current war and he secretly enlists. However, Pinocchio does not emerge from the initiation experience of war with a new awareness of self and his role in society. Instead, the protagonist's mental and physical identity are gradually undermined and demolished, to the point that in the conclusion of the novel Pinocchio is happy to be turned back into a puppet (figure 6).

From the beginning of the novel, Collodi Nipote's Pinocchio is close to the original Pinocchio: he is curious, impatient and stubborn. As in *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, the novel is set in motion by an escape. However, instead of being attracted by a puppet show, Collodi Nipote's Pinocchio is diverted by a parade of soldiers leaving for the front. Pinocchio appears initially puzzled and frightened by their fervor and their readiness to die happily for the country. However, the propagandistic apparatus of songs, slogans and celebrations rapidly overturns Pinocchio's reasoning and perplexities (p.13).

*Passavano I soldati. In testa una compagnia di bersaglieri ciclisti, poi la fanfare, poi il reggimento, e i carri di ambulanza, e i militi della Croce Rossa e una lunga fila di zappatori. La gente applaudiva, gettava baci, fiori, e colmava di piccolo doni i bersaglieri che, rotte le file e mischiati alla folla, rispondevano agli applause con frenetici evviva all'Italia, al Re, all'Esercito. [...]*

*“O dove vanno?” Domando’ ad un verchietto arzillo che gli si trovava vicino, e che si sfogava a gridare: “Viva l'Italia!” come se fosse un giovanotto di primo pelo.*

*“Vanno alla guerra.”*

*“Alla guerra per davvero? Faranno alle fucilate col fumo soltanto o anche con le palle di piombo?”*

*“Purtroppo anche con quelle.”*

*“E moriranno tutti?”*

*“Tutti speriamo di no... ma vanno a battersi per l'onore e la grandezza della Patria, e chi muore per la Patria puo’ morire contento.”*

*Pinocchio non fiato’. Si diede una solenne grattatina di zucca. Quell morir contento non gli andava troppo a fagiuolo. La morte gli aveva fatto sempre una gran paura tutte le volte che gli era passata vicina. [...]*

*E poi, le note allegre della fanfare, la gioconda spensieratezza dei soldati, le grida della folla , gli fecero nascere a un tratto un monte di strane idee nella testa. La guerra, le schioppettate, corse da una parte, botte dall'altra, cavalli a*

*corsa sfrenata, bandiere al vento, inni di vittoria, medaglie sullo stomaco, nemici legati come salami, bottino di ricchezze, trofei di guerra gli danzarono una ridda fantastica dinanzi agli occhi. La guerra doveva essere... un mestiere fatto apposta per lui .*

[Soldiers were passing. At the head was a company of sharpshooters (bersaglieri), then the band, then the regiment, the Red Cross ambulance, and soldiers, and a long line of sappers. Everybody clapped, threw kisses and flowers, and overwhelmed the bersaglieri with little gifts. The soldiers broke ranks and they mingled with the crowd and answered the applause with loud cheers for Italy, the King and the Army. [...]

“Oh! Where are they going? Pinocchio asked a sprightly old man who was standing nearby, shouting, “Hurrah for Italy!” as if he were a boy.

“They are going to the war.”

“Are they really off to war? Will they fire only powder from their guns, or real, lead bullets, too?”

“Indeed yes, real bullets, too.”

“And will they die?”

“We hope not all of them – but they are going to fight for the honour and greatness of their country, and he who dies for his country may die happy.”

Pinocchio did not breathe. He scratched his head solemnly. This “die happy” was silly. Death has always frightened him whenever he had come near to it. [...]



And then the gay notes of the band, the joyous air of the soldiers, the cheers of the crowd, suddenly brought a strange idea into his head. The war, with its cannons, marches on one side, fighting on the other, horses dashing, flags waving in the wind, songs of victory, medals on the breast, prisoners tied together like sausages, war trophies, danced before his eyes in a fantastic dance. The war must be just the place for him.] <sup>b</sup>

Pinocchio's curiosity about the war and his desire to observe it as described in this passage closely recall the enthusiasm of the young protagonist of the war novels discussed in the first chapter. Many myths and stereotypes characteristic of the war novel, such as the benevolent soldier-hero, the unconditional support and adoration of the Italian people for their army, and the moral support of the old soldiers of the Risorgimento, are summoned up in these few paragraphs. The almost ridiculous rapidity with which Pinocchio abandons his initial doubts and embraces the lavish image of the conflict can be read as a parody of the young soldier-hero's profound commitment to the war cause typical of the contemporary war novels. Moreover, it seems plausible to interpret Pinocchio's rapid conversion from a fearful attitude to an enthusiastic adhesion to the war cause as an allusion to the enthusiasm and devotion with which a majority of Italian people had responded to the propaganda apparatus, thus confirming the image of Italians as a "popolo bambino" ("child people"), malleable to persuasion by the power authorities. Collodi Nipote seems then to denounce Italian people's insecurity and

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<sup>b</sup> Collodi Nipote [P. Lorenzini] *The Heart of Pinocchio. New Adventures of the Celebrated Little Puppet*. Translated by V. Watson. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1919

gullibility, as well as the ability of propaganda to morally subjugate children, adults and soldiers alike.

Despite his young age, Pinocchio decides to enlist as a volunteer. Once he arrives at the front, however, Pinocchio is awakened to the reality hidden behind the veil of propaganda. He realizes his unpreparedness, fragility and complete subordination to the military authorities. The first time he participates in an attack on the enemy trenches, he is terrified, and desperately looks for a hole in which to hide from the grenades. Through his protagonist's errors and misadventures, Collodi Nipote offers a realistic and detailed description of life in the trenches in its most depressing aspects. Pinocchio observes the restlessness and despair of his fellow soldiers, and describes them as "birds in a net" while waiting for the enemy attack (p.69), or "turning into crabs" when exposed to the rain (p.70).

The alpine setting which was celebrated as idyllic, bright and lively by adventure war literature, such as Bruni's *Pinocchietto against Austria*, becomes a hostile environment in Collodi Nipote's work. Pinocchio's constant struggle with hardship and adverse climatic conditions is not a source of patriotic inspiration as it was for Pinocchietto. Instead, Pinocchio trembles with fear, suffers from hunger, shivers with cold. The mountains reveal Pinocchio's fears, cowardice and ultimately his profound humanity. The war becomes, however, an opportunity to "learn geography better than in school" (p.62), and Pinocchio gradually commits to his role within the battalion. Yet his commitment is described more as a survival strategy than a real engagement to the cause.

The tragedy of mutilation is central to *The Heart of Pinocchio*. The protagonist loses one leg, then the other one, then his arms and two ribs. His initial incredulity and fear evolve into anger when the military surgeon, Doctor Cutmeup, celebrates his artificial limbs as a “real triumph of technology” or “the Austrian improvement” (p.95). Collodi Nipote offers here a bitter parody of the sacralization of the mutilated promoted by the main dominant ideology. The celebration of the wounded and their return to a normal life with appropriate prostheses was a popular subject among contemporary children’s magazines. For example, the article *I Piedi al Lavoro per le Braccia* [Feet at work as Arms], published by the *Corriere dei Piccoli* in February 1916, promoted the sale of ingenious mechanisms which permitted those who had lost their arms to use their feet in order to write or comb their hair. Similarly, in the article *Occhi e Nasi* [Eyes and Noses], published on the magazine *La Lettura* in August 1917, children’s author Vamba [Luigi Bertelli] exalts the values of rubber, a material used to make facial prostheses, which he describes as “malleable and resistant to prolonged use, therefore holding the two virtues proper to the live flesh with which it is combined, the holy flesh of our heroes” (Fochesato, 2011). Pinocchio however, reminds his surgeon that “real legs don’t need to be oiled” (p.93).

Furthermore, Collodi Nipote repeatedly makes fun of the rigidity and pomposity of the military hierarchical system. For example, general Winthear, who is in command of Pinocchio’s battalion, engages in a magniloquent talk about the necessity to identify and eliminate all spies without realizing that Pinocchio is hiding under his chair. Despite his fanatic patriotic commitment, general Winthear appears as a ridiculous character,

crushed by his gout; he never participates in the fighting and ends up pretending to be wounded in order to be declared unfit and sent home.

The absurd names chosen for the characters further reassess and ridicule the military authorities, or highlight through bitter irony the gap between the commanders' perception of the conflict and the soldiers' experience. For example, General Vinciguerra (General Winthewart) is obsessed by the victory and completely unconcerned with the human costs of the war. Caporal Fanfara (Corporal Big Fuss), despite his magniloquent patriotic speeches, appears reluctant to take part in the actual fighting. On the other side, the life of Soldato Mollica (Private Breadough) appears just as malleable and dependent to the authorities' will as a piece of dough: he accepts willingly being sent on to a suicidal mission against the enemy's trenches and dies in No Man's Land.

Collodi Nipote also expresses his doubts about the reasons for the war through the character of Geppetto. In the final chapter of the novel, the carpenter is happily reunited with his son but he is repelled by his mutilations and demands some explanations of the blue fairy (p.200):

*“Ah! Fatina, Fatina!! Ma chi l’ha ridotto in questo modo il mio povero burattino? Che diamine sono tutti questi meccanismi, e queste diavolerie? Io l’avevo fatto di legno, tutto di legno, e così bene che nessuno era mai stato capace di imitarlo. Perché hai lasciato che me lo conciassero in questo modo? [...] Ah! Fatina! Chi è stato a ridurmelo in questo modo?”*

*“La Patria, vecchietto mio.”*

*“La Patria?” e resto li’ un momento con gli occhi spalancati per la sorpresa. La Patria?! Aveva detto proprio così’ Fatina?*

[“Oh, Fatina! Fatina! How did they bring my poor puppet to such a state?” sobbed Geppetto as he looked at Pinocchio. “What under the sun is all this machinery and these contraptions? I made him of wood, all of wood, and so splendidly that no one was ever able to imitate him. Why did you let them abuse him in this way? [...] Oh, Fatina! Who brought him to such a state?”]

“Our country, dear friend.”

“Our country?” and for a moment he stood there, his eyes wide open with surprise. “Our country did you say, Fatina?” Then he was lost in thought again.]

Collodi Nipote appears, however, more concerned with the condition of the soldier at war than with the conflict itself. The conclusion of the novel, with the return of the mutilated Pinocchio to his father and his final complete reconversion into a puppet, reinforces the parallel between the vicissitudes of the protagonist and the soldier’s experience of the war, both described as paths towards an existence as fragile and powerless puppets with strings manipulated by the authorities.

*Il Cuore di Pinocchio* therefore retains considerable value both as a historical document and as an expression of resistance against the contemporary dominating ideology, which would become the basis of the emergent fascist doctrine in the twenties. Against the infantilization and glorification of the nature and consequences of the Great War, Collodi Nipote opposes a realistic presentation of the conflict. His satirical point of view does not hide the cruelties of the war, and patriotic exaltation is strongly reduced and

questioned. The only aspect of the war that appears positive is the mutual assistance among men involved in the same tragedy on the war front.

Against the militarization of the child promoted by official discourse and aligned authors, which laid the foundation for the construction of the fascist image of childhood as animated by a fervent nationalistic spirit and enthusiastically involved in politics, Collodi Nipote opposes a child protagonist whose enthusiasm for the uniform has less to do with the patriotic cause than with a desire to show off and emulate adults. Pinocchio is neither a hero nor a martyr, but a victim of events and of his own curiosity. His participation to the conflict is not essential to the victory of the Italian army, as it was the case for Bruni's Pinocchetto or Visentini's Lorenzo. In fact, neither his interventions nor his wounds change the course of the war. His fellow soldiers mock him for his naivety and manipulated enthusiasms: "You wanted to be a volunteer; now you see how much fun it is" (p.34). He appears as the antithesis of the fascist Balilla, whose self-realization can only happen through absolute commitment to collective patriotic ideals and engagement with paramilitary groups leading to a career in the army. Instead, Pinocchio's militarization reads as an inexorable gradual loss of identity and free will.

Finally, Collodi Nipote's linguistic register is plain, straightforward, lively, and therefore profoundly different from the magniloquent language and relentless rhetoric typical of contemporary children's literature on war. His ironic and polemical stance, freed from the conditioning of sentimentalism and pedagogism, succeeds in exposing faults and limits of the process of involvement of childhood with the rising patriotic and martial discourse.

Therefore, both Cuman Pertile and Collodi Nipote questioned and criticized the emerging practices of children's involvement with the contemporary political and martial agenda promoted by war children's literature. Their resistance against the pressure towards ideological subjection is paradigmatic of the cultural criticism and subversion of the predominant ideology through which later authors would challenge the indoctrination imposed by the fascist totalitarian discourse.

The twilight movement and the comical and satirical current enriched the panorama of contemporary children's literature with creative and subversive inventions. Despite their evident differences in terms of narrative styles and linguistic strategies, both Cuman Pertile and Collodi Nipote managed to defend spaces for questioning and subverting the contemporary predominant ideology, thus endeavoring to contribute to the formation of their young readers' independent cultural identities, rather than to the education of perfect patriots.

*The influence of subversive children's literature published between 1914 and 1921 on non-aligned children's books published during the Ventennio*

In the two decades of dictatorship that followed the fascist seizure of power in 1922, the enforced submission of children's authors and publishers to censorship and their constriction to a mechanistic repetition of the same contents and messages progressively suffocated freedom and creativity. But the appropriation of children's literature as envisioned by the fascist regime was never complete. Margins of freedom which propaganda and censorship organs did not manage to penetrate continued in children's

narratives and the periodic press. These were “duty-free zones”, as defined by Pino Boero and De Luca in *La Letteratura per l’Infanzia* (1995), through which authors and editors endeavoured to resist the seizure of children’s imaginations.

Given the impossibility to openly criticize the fascist doctrine without incurring the ban of the censorship organs, children’s authors and editors expressed their disapproval and resistance in more subtle and implicit ways, namely through peculiar choices of genres and styles, opposite to those recommended by the regime’s intellectuals (Boero and De Luca, 2009). These narrative choices can be interpreted as related to and inspired by relation the twilight current and the comical and satirical current which emerged in the previous decade.

For instance, one of the characteristic narrative elements suggested by the fascist pedagogues as inherent to the perfect fascist book was to maintain a strong realism, in order to emphasize the moralist and educative aspect of the text and to prevent potential treacherous fantasies, dangerous ambiguities, and the critical potential of irony and sarcasm. Narrative elements expressing criticism of the fascist pedagogy should therefore be sought among those literary products which offered to the child reader an opportunity to encounter the dimension of fantasy and the ambiguities and arbitraries of the imaginary. This is the case, for example in such as Annie Vivanti *Sua altezza!* [Your Majesty] (1924), Carola Prosperi’s *Codaditopo* [Mouse Tail] (1930) and Giovanni Fanciulli’s *Lisa-Betta* (1932). The use of psychological and fantasy narrative elements as a means of implicit criticism of the political exploitation of children’s consciences is similar to the work of many twilight authors operating during the Great War and its immediate aftermath, like Cuman Pertile.



Further elements of criticism can be sought in texts declining to offer a moralizing reading in favour of the creation of reading material which could represent a space free for pure pleasure and fun. Similarly to Sto and Collodi Nipote, many children's authors operating during the Ventennio endeavored to convey important messages about the importance of maintaining literature as a space to cultivate imagination and empathy by relying on humour and grotesque. Exemplary of this production are the episodic stories of C. Bisi's *Sor Pampurio* (1925), S. Tofano *Taddeo e Veneranda* (1926) and B. Angioletta's *Marmittone* (1929). Through their comic and sarcastic stance, they appear to be aimed at questioning the figure of the perfect fascist, by highlighting his faults and typical weaknesses.

Other narrative elements in disagreement with the ethics of the regime can be sought in those works of children's literature describing the process of growth into adulthood as an individual path, characterized by independent discoveries and experiences which uncover ambiguities and moral dilemmas and encourage the development of critical perspectives. Both Cuman Pertile and Collodi Nipote's novels, discussed earlier in this chapter, offer important examples of an invitation to independent and critical maturation. The subversive quality of this topic appears even more evident when contextualized in the cultural politics of the regime, which denied the value of an independent and creative formation process to promote instead the education of the "New Italian".

The analysis of subversive children's literature published in Italy between the beginning of the First World War and the establishment of the fascist regime therefore offers an

important insight into the understanding of children's literature as connected with its critical social role and its capacity to indicate individual path, diverging from the one imposed on the young to promote the formation of a unified national mentality.

## Conclusion

Children's literature about war, which was the most widespread genre of children's books during the years of the Great War and the first post-war period, had the immediate effect of explaining the conflict to young readers and moulding their interpretation of the war through a patriotic lens. A majority of texts belonging to this genre justified and motivated the impact of war on children's lives with great ideals and expectations, thus nourishing a process of progressive habituation and unconditional support for the patriotic cause.

The achievement of this objective was largely based on a process of infantilization of the nature and consequences of war. By applying the symbolic and semantic apparatus of childhood and proposing an innocent and harmless framework, authors reduced and defused the war, certainly rendering it far less harsh than it was in reality. Narrative codes specific to euphemistic discourse on war were introduced, to include terms of endearment and childlike registers, often trivial or comical, but also sometimes cruel and sadistic, characterized by the common denominator of paternalistic and complacent tones. Trivialization, stereotypization and nationalistic exaltation intertwined and converged in this discourse. To the eyes of the young reader, the conflict was reduced to a children's problem or described as a situation in which children's intervention could have a truly decisive role, both when presented in the form of a game and through the more dramatic tones of the heroic and sacrificial myth.

As a result, a parallel process of militarization of the child took place. In fact, the diffusion of children's war literature contributed to the gradual relinquishment of the status of childhood as an innocent and ingenuous age, with the right of preservation from an active commitment to politics that had characterized idealist pedagogic philosophies popular in Italy up to the beginning of the twentieth century. This was substituted by an image of the child as actively involved in politics and able to embrace themes of war fighting, violence and death.

The analysis of children's texts published between 1914 and 1921 reveals in fact the emergence of a tension between the desire of authors to describe children's everyday life experience and their affective relationships, and their willingness to satisfy the requirements of the war propaganda mechanisms. Among a majority of contemporary authors, the answer to this dilemma seems to be a tentative compromise between the two conceptions of children's identity through a dynamic search for a model of children's literature able to conjugate idealistic aspirations and nationalistic expectations. However, in response to the increasing demands for commitment to the construction of a popular consensus imposed by the government authorities, this compromise progressively shifted toward a utilitarian vision of children's literature as an instrument of manipulated socialization, dedicated to the diffusion of the pedagogy of sacrifice and heroism.

The diffusion of children's literature about war also generated longer terms effects. In fact, within the process of politicization and mobilization of children's literature, it is possible to identify themes and narrative features which anticipate and lead to the

formation of some important elements of the fascist ideological apparatus, which emerged in the first post-war period.

In particular, children's war literature contributed to the establishment of the fascist model of childhood, the "Balilla", a fundamental figure within the party's educative project. In fact, authors of this genre introduced a model of the child as a fervent nationalist, whose utmost desire is to engage in a precocious transition to the adult world, which often coincides with the soldier's life. The direct or indirect participation in the war and the life in the army are identified as the best possible school of life, the only one able to impart desirable values such as discipline, patience and humility. Therefore, the diffusion of this genre perpetuated the message that one's self-realization and legitimization, both at a personal and social level, could happen only through the commitment to and sacrifice for the collective patriotic and martial ideals. Thus, the creators of young protagonists in children's war books anticipated the fascist interpretation of childhood and the role of its literature as a crucial element for the construction and diffusion of the party nationalistic doctrine.

Secondly, this genre proposed an exalted and euphemistic interpretation of the war, presented as a supreme cause, an opportunity for the definitive liberation of the oppressed, and an occasion for the defense of human rights and freedom against the menace of a tyrannical enemy. A religious interpretation of the conflict progressively gained ground, especially through the adoption of the religious lexicon to describe war related conditions; for example, the martyrdom of child soldiers. Overall, this reading of the conflict often involved an interpretation of the events that was far from reality and skewed towards the exigencies of propaganda. It seems plausible to identify this partial

falsification of historical events as one element of the ground in which the dictatorial fascist regime would take root.

Moreover, children's literature on war contributed to spread the use of the empathetic and moralist registers, magniloquent descriptions and relentless rhetoric which were profusely adopted by the fascist communication media. Therefore, children's literature on war published between 1914 and 1921 contributed significantly to the establishment of the project of the subjection of children to the State and to their organization into para-military models of education, which was to be codified and imposed with the affirmation of the governing fascist party in the following decade.

However, my analysis of the work of Cuman Pertile and Collodi Nipote demonstrates how, despite a rising proportion of children's literature espousing the nationalist and martial attitudes which dominated contemporary official discourse, twilight and satirical authors were able to convey alternative messages, thus expressing their resistance to the politicization of children's readings.

Both authors are representative of ways in which the twilight and satirical subgenres challenged the glorification and sacralization interpretation of the First World War promoted by contemporary war children's literature. Instead, they offered to their child readers a more pragmatic view of the conflict as well as keys to interpret its consequences, with the aim of helping them to rationalize their anxieties and their enthusiasm about the current political circumstances.

Similarly, both twilight and satirical authors resisted the value assigned in the kind of publications discussed in the second chapter to children's direct or indirect participation

in the war effort as a desirable and dignifying process. They rejected the vision of children's condition as an incomplete stage of existence, to be shaped as early as possible into a mature and socially useful form by precociously promoting values such as a spirit of sacrifice and responsibility. Instead, they celebrated the needs and desires that they perceived as peculiar to childhood.

Their approaches present, however, profound differences. In fact, Cuman Pertile adopts a clear ideological position by actively condemning war through her explicit exposition of the suffering caused by the conflict for both soldiers and civilians, and by sharing her belief in education as a way to make war redundant. As a result, Cuman Pertile prompts her child readers to adhere to her commitment in promoting universal peace. Her narratives offer hope and optimistic reassurance, but they demand child readers' uncritical adhesion to her humanitarian values.

Collodi Nipote's ideological position on the war and on children's political engagement is expressed less explicitly. He does not openly condemn the war, but he criticizes and questions its value. Through the description of Pinocchio's vulnerability and powerlessness on the battlefields, he reassesses the character of the miniature soldier protagonist of many adventure war narratives. Pinocchio is an anti-hero who implicitly exposes the extent to which the traditional child soldier protagonist falsely naturalizes and glorifies the war. Collodi Nipote highlights the human costs of the war, but he does not offer a ready judgment on the opportunity of the conflict, nor does he describe future peaceful scenarios. His narrative, and in particular the conclusion where the protagonist loses his voice after having been repeatedly mutilated, remains open to interpretation.

Collodi Nipote's skepticism prompts his child readers' personal response and critical judgment.

Both authors' bodies of work have an important value as evidence of the years between 1914 and 1921 as a period of political dynamism, in which official discourse was still subject to cultural criticism, and as indications that the attitude of children's authors to the war was not unanimous, but differentiated and dynamic. Moreover, the currents they represent helped to shape the foundations of a subgenre of subversive children's literature designed to resist the unthinking acceptance of the patriotic and martial attitudes associated with contemporary conformist children's texts. Despite the restrictions imposed by the progressive establishment of the totalitarian regime, this subversive subgenre survived in the following two decades, succeeding in releasing itself from the fascist obligation of ideological indoctrination.

The analysis of children's literature published in Italy between the First World War and the establishment of the fascist regime has greatly informed my understanding of children's literature as connected with its critical social role and its capacity to contest values and models imposed by society. In particular, my research on subversive children's literature gave me an important insight into the concept of childhood as an unconventional, skeptical and creative phase. I have gained a deeper appreciation of the cultural significance of children's books describing the process of growth into adulthood as an individual path, characterized by independent discoveries and experiences which uncover ambiguities and moral dilemmas and encourage the development of critical perspectives.



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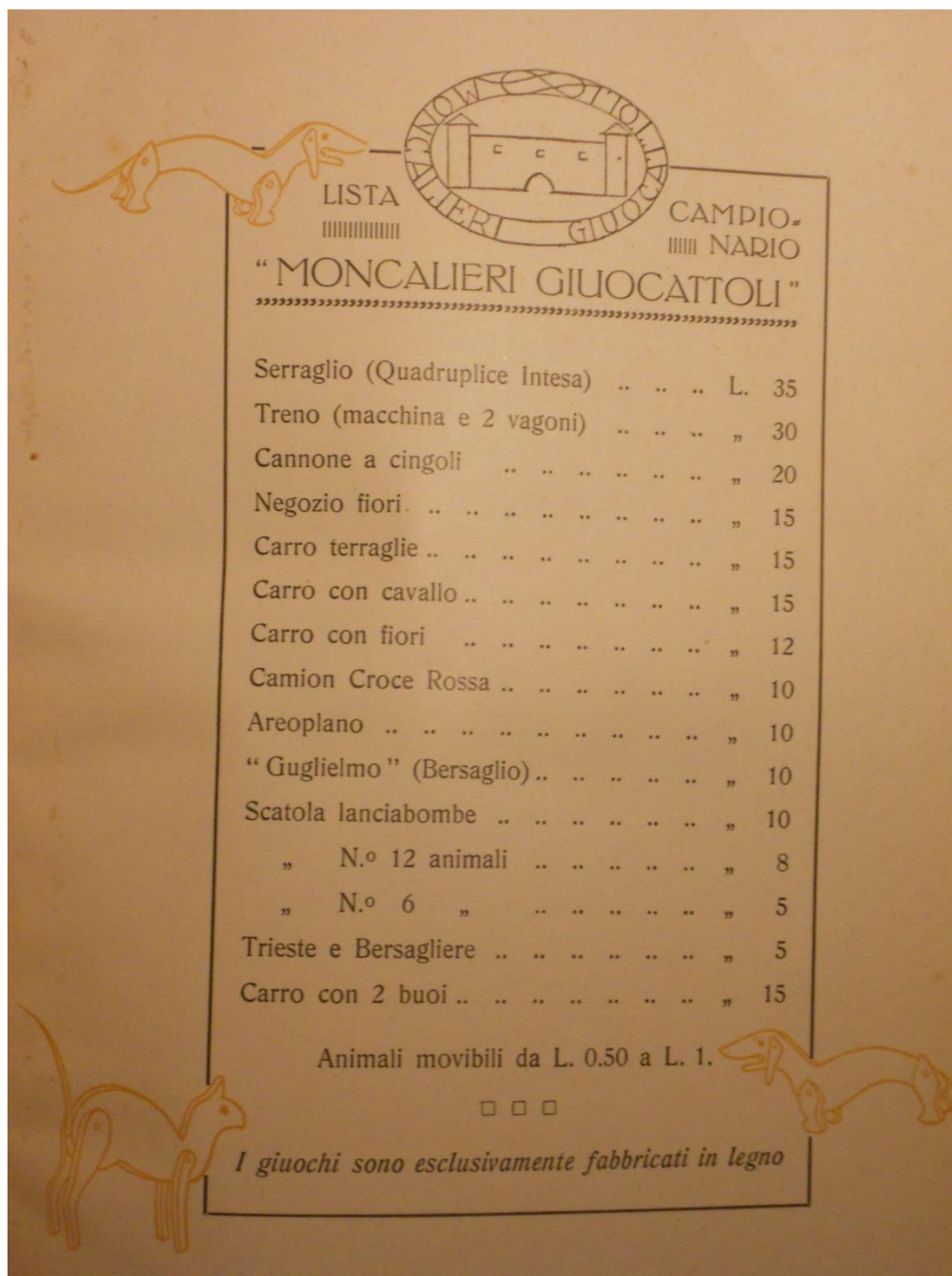
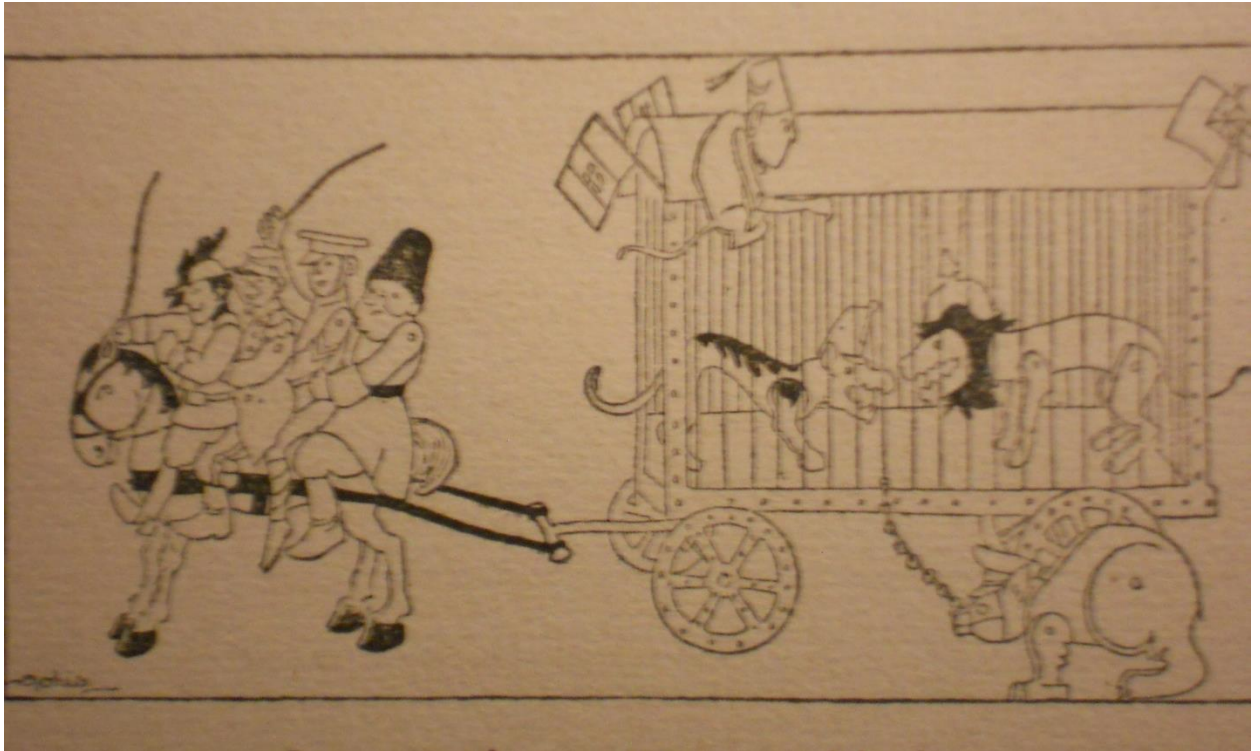


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**Figure 2: the 'Serraglio Quadruplice Intesa' ('Menagerie Quadruple Entente')  
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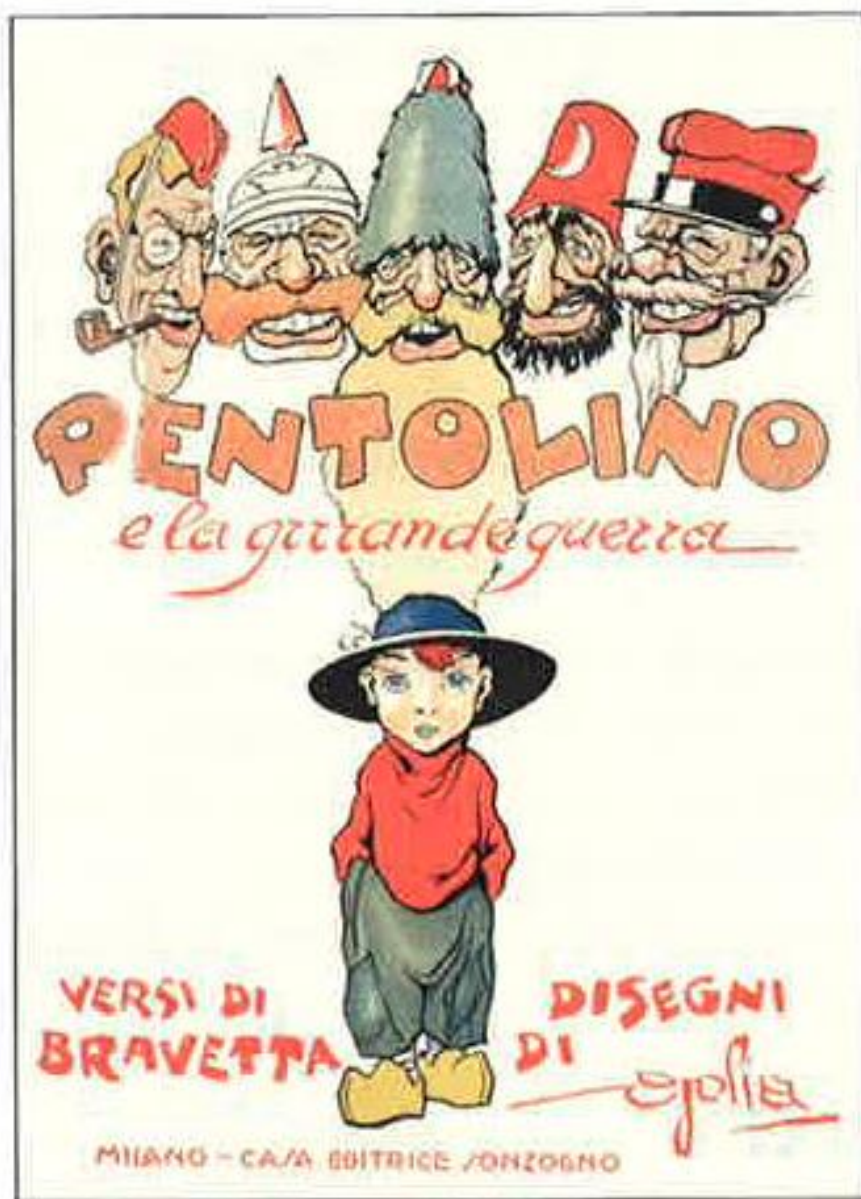


Figure 3: front cover of V. Bravetta's *Pentolino e la Grrrande Guerra* (1915)



Figure 4: front cover of Golia's *ABCDARIO di guerra* (1915)

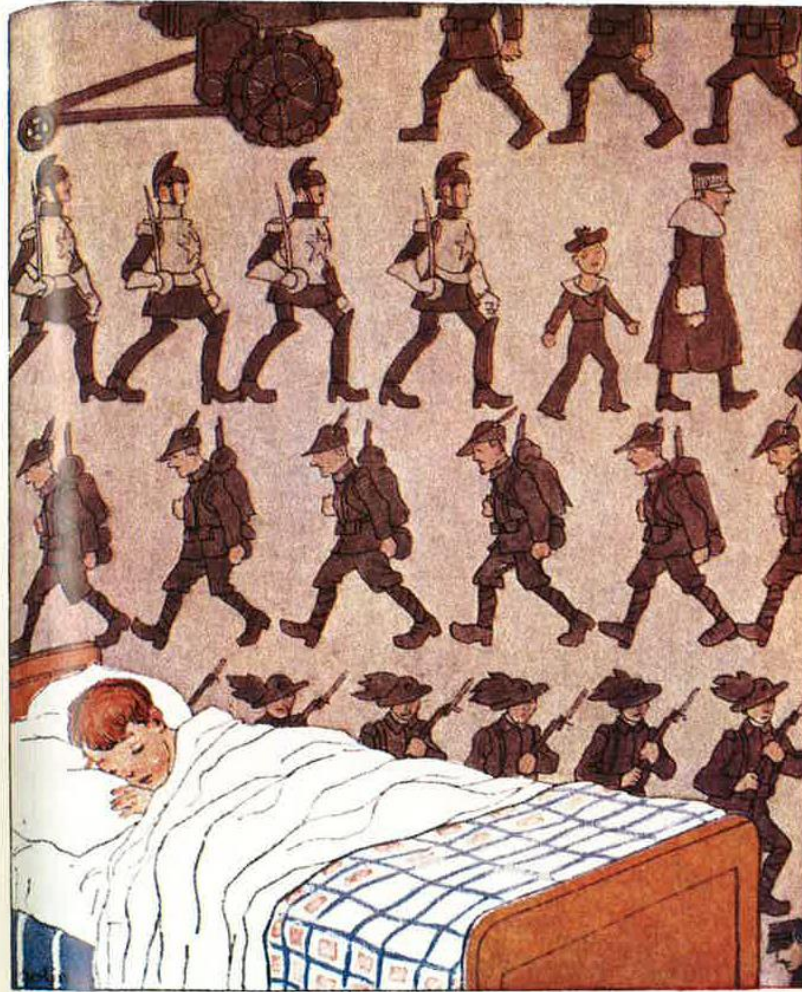




**Figure 5: front cover of Collodi Nipote [P. Lorenzini]’s *Il cuore di Pinocchio* (1917), illustrated by C. Chiostri**



Figure 6: front cover of B. Bruni *Pinocchio contro l'Austria* (1915)



**Figure 7: illustration from Teresah *Il romanzo di Pasqualino* (1917), illustrated by Golia. The young boy protagonist is dreaming about joining the Bersaglieri corps.**

Appendix: Annotated bibliography of children's novels and short story collections published in Italy between 1914 and 1921

Title: **Pentolino e la Grrrande Guerra** [Pentolino and the Grrreat War]

Author: V. Bravetta

Illustrator: Golia [E. Colmo]

Editor: Milano: Sonzogno, 1915

Synopsis: The boy protagonist receives a box of toy Italian soldiers (bersaglieri) as a birthday presents. The toy soldiers became alive and they fight against Turkish and German soldiers. Their intervention determines the end of the war

Keywords: novel, war, ludic war literature, war as children's game

Title: **Tranquillino... Dopo La Guerra Vuol Creare Il Mondo Nuovo** [Tranquillino... After The War, He Wants To Create A New World]

Author: V. Bravetta

Illustrator: Golia [E. Colmo]

Editor: Milano: Treves, 1915

Synopsis: The novel opens with a desolating post-war scene. The whole world has been destroyed by the recent war. Tranquillino and his friend Sirenetta, who have miraculously survived the conflict, set on creating a new world, without wars. But the violent human instincts prevail on Tranquillino, and his project is never accomplished. The ideal of world peace appears thus incompatible with human nature, portrayed as violent and greedy.

Keywords: novel, war, pacifism, subversive literature



Title: **Parla il chiodo! Scherzo d'attualita' Per Fanciulli** [Talk to the Spike! A Children's Joke Of Our Times]

Author: C. Biscaretti

Editor: Milano: Vallardi, 1916

Synopsis: A group of boys finds a spike. They believe that the spike has fallen from the Kaiser's helmet, and they make fun of the German army.

Keywords: short story, war, ludic war literature, war as children's game

Title: **Storielle Di Lucciole E Di Stelle** [Little Tales about Stars and Dragonflies]

Author: G. Bistolfi

Editor: Milano: Treves, 1914

Synopsis: A collection of short stories all based on metaphors and figures of speech, which, taken literally, create absurd situations and plots.

Keywords: short story collection, comical and satirical literature

Title: **L'Avventurissima E Altre Storie Quasi Straordinarie Per Fanciulli** [The Great Adventure And Other Almost Extraordinary Children's Stories]

Author: G. Bistolfi

Illustrator: E. Toddi

Editor: Milano: Treves, 1919

Synopsis: A collection of short stories/allegories based on non-sensical and grotesque situations. The stories share a somber and pessimistic reflection upon humanity. Some of the stories are set on the battlefield.

Keywords: short story collection, war, comical and satirical literature

Title: **Pinocchietto Contro l'Austria** [Pinocchietto Against Austria]

Author: B. Bruni

Editor: Milano: Bietti, 1915

Synopsis: Pinocchietto is an adolescent boy with a long nose. When he learns that Italy has entered the war, he runs away from home to enlist. Later on, he participates to a successful battle against the Austrian army.

Keywords: novel, war, miniature soldiers, adventure war literature

Title: **Il Cuore Di Pinocchio. Nuove Avventure Del Celebre Burattino** [The Hearth Of Pinocchio. New Adventures Of The Famous Puppet]

Author: Collodi Nipote [P.Lorenzini]

Illustrator: C. Chiostrì

Synopsis: Pinocchio, now a young boy, assists to a soldier parade while on his way to school. Full of enthusiasm, he runs away from home to join the battlefield, only to discover that the soldiers' life is terribly harsh and dangerous. A series of wounds and mutilations turns him back into a puppet.

Keywords: novel, war, political satire, adventure war literature, miniature soldiers

Title: **Ninetta E Tirintin** [Ninetta E Tirintin]

Author: A. Cuman Pertile

Editor: Firenze: Marzocco, 1918

Synopsis: The adventures of two tiny rag dolls tied together by a wool thread. In the first half of the novel, they explore the vegetable garden where they live. In the second half of the novel, they travel to the battlefield in the pocket of a young soldier.

Keywords: novel, war, subversive literature, twilight literature, women on the home front, children on the home front, pacifism, toys

Title: **Fra Canti, Balli, Fiori E Ghirlandelle** [Among Songs, Dances, Flowers and Garlands]

Author: A. Cuman Pertile

Editor: Milano: Vallardi, 1921

Synopsis: A collection of stories about children's everyday life. Some stories are set during the Great War, and focus on the impact of the conflict on women and children.

Keywords: short story collection, war, subversive literature, twilight literature, women on the home front, children on the home front, pacifism

Title: **Da Ragazzi A Uomini** [From Boys To Men]

Author: C. Del Soldato

Editor: Milano: Ragazzi d' Italia, 1920

Synopsis: The story of a group of young boys who love to role-play as soldiers and create a secret patriotic society. With the advent of the war, they enlist and leave for the battlefield. Only the youngest child, who is ill, has to stay at home. However, through his epistolary communication with his friends on the battlefield, he lives vicariously their experience as soldiers, narrated through a patriotic and emphatic register.

Keywords: novel, war, ludic war literature, adventure war literature, war as children's game, miniature soldiers

Title: **Pipetto Vuole Andare Alla Guerra** [Pipetto Wants To Go To War]

Author: Donna Paola [P. Grosson Boronchelli]

Illustror: G. Moroni Celsi, A. Mussino

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1916

Synopsis: Pipetto is a Florentine orphan, leaving in misery. He is enthusiast about the war, and, once he learns that Italy has entered the conflict, dreams about joining the army, although he is too young and he doesn't have any means to buy a uniform or a rifle. In the end, however, desperate to join the army, he sets off to walk alone all the way to the battlefield.

Keywords: novel, war, adventure war literature, verist war literature, miniature soldiers, children on the home front

Title: **La Gran Fiamma** [The Great Flame]

Author: G. Fabiani

Editor: Milano: Vallardi, 1920

Synopsis: A collection of short stories with a common theme: the resistance of the Italian people living in the areas occupied by the Austrian army. Some stories describe episode of passive resistance of families on the home front; others focus on local soldiers escaping the Austrian army to join the Italian side. Their inner fervent patriotism nourishes the "great flame" of Italian collective conscience.

Keywords: short story collection, war, verist war literature, adventure war literature, children on the home front, miniature soldiers

Title: **Il Castello Delle Carte** [The Card Castle]

Author: G. Fanciulli

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1914

Synopsis: The novel was inspired by Carroll's "Alice's Adventure in Wonderland". Every day, before bedtime, a family builds together a castle out of playing cards. During the night, the cards become alive.

Keywords: novel, twilight literature

Title: **Sussurri** [Whispers]

Author: U. Ghiron

Editor: Torino: Paravia, 1920

Synopsis: A collection of stories and poems focused on an emphatic praise of nature, domestic objects and familiar relationships. Everyday objects are often personified.

Keywords: short story collection, twilight children's literature

Title: **ABCDario DI Guerra** [A War ABC]

Author: Golia [E. Colmo]

Illustrator: Golia [E. Colmo]

Editor: Torino: Lattes, 1915

Synopsis: An alphabet book where each letter is associated with key vocabulary related to the current war, for instance battle places, war heroes' names, and weapons. It contains explicit satirical references to current political characters and events.

Keywords: alphabet book, war, subversive literature, comical and satirical literature

Title: **I Tre Talismani** [The Three Talismans]

Title: **La Principessa Si Sposa** [The Princess Gets Married]

Author: G. Gozzano

Editor: Ostiglia: La Scolastica, 1917

Synopsis: Two collections of six original fairy-tales. The author amplifies and exaggerates the typical structures and features of the fairy tale genre to reach absurd, nonsensical situations. The stories are characterized by a sophisticated language register.

Keywords: short story collection, twilight children's literature

Title: **Le Fiabe In Versi** [Fairy Tales in Verses]

Author: A. Guglielminetti

Editor: Ostiglia: La Scolastica, 1921

Synopsis: A collection of original fairy tales, focusing in particular on the role of the women through metaphors and allegories. The longest fairy-tale, “La Fata Ondina” is set during the war and draws to the absurdities of the conflict.

Keywords: short story collection, war, subversive literature, twilight literature, women on the home front, pacifism

Title: **Bimbi Di Trieste. Scene Dal Vero.** [Children of Trieste. Scenes form Real Life]

Author: Haydee [I. Finzi]

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1916

Synopsis: A collection of short stories about three siblings living in Trieste, a city occupied by the Austrian army. The three young children look for every opportunity to express their love for the Fatherland and contribute to the resistance on the home front.

Keywords: short story collection, war, verist war literature, women on the home front, children on the home front

Title: **I Ragazzi E La Guerra** [Children And War]

Author: Marga [M. Fazzini]

Illustrator: C. Chiostri

Synopsis: A collection of short stories focused on highlighting the common enthusiasm, passion and concerns that the Italian people were experiencing on the home front and on the battlefield. Stories about war orphans are alternated to stories about young soldiers' sacrifices. The enemy is consistently portrayed as cruel and barbarian,

Keywords: short story collection, war, verist war literature, adventure war literature, children on the home front, miniature soldiers

Title: **Cenerella** [Cinderella]

Author: M. Messina

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1918

Synopsis: Young Cenerella's brother is called to the battlefield, thus leaving his family without any financial support. Cenerella is forced to leave her native Sicily and to go to work as a servant for a rich family, while her mother and sisters have to migrate to America. The return of her brother from the battlefield restores some peace for the Cenerella, who is finally reunited with her mother.

Keywords: novel, war, verist war literature, children on the home front, women on the home front, pacifism

Title: **Tre Favole Belle** [Three Beautiful Fairy Tales]

Author: F. Pastonchi

Illustrator: B. Angoletta

Editor: Roma: Mondadori, 1920

Synopsis: A collection of three original fairy tales. Their common theme is the strength of human relationships and feelings. The fairy-tale elements are overshadowed by the unusual somber and tragic events; death and personal sacrifices are common to all three tales.

Keywords: short story collection, twilight literature, fairy-tale

Title: **Fratello. Libro Per La Giovinezza** [Brother. A book for the youth]

Author: V. Podrecca

Editor: Roma: Berlutti, 1921

Synopsis: An allegory of the war, personified as a soldier. The main events of the Great War are retold through the soldier's vicissitudes. The soldier's fervent patriotism is presented as a supreme role model. At times, the soldier's story involves fairy-tale elements, such as a fairy coming to his rescue.

Keywords: novel, war, adventure war literature, fairy-tale

Title: **Il Piu' Felice Bambino Del Mondo** [The Happiest Child in The World]

Author: C. Prosperi

Illustrator: A. Mussino

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1920

Synopsis: The story of a minuscule child, Furletto, and of his education. His mentor, the Fata Portafortuna [Fairy Goodluck] finds him in a nut, and then guides him in his exploration of the world behind their home.

Keywords: novel, twilight literature, fairy-tale, bildungsroman

Title: **I Cenci Della Nonna** [Grandma's Rags]

Author: D. Provenzal

Editor: Roma: La Voce, 1920

Synopsis: A collection of stories mingling children's everyday life with fairy-tale like events. These wondrous events are often used as a pretext to lead children's readers towards a severe examination of their conscience.

Keywords: short story collection, twilight children's literature

Title: **L'Aereo Di Girandolino** [Girandolino's Airplane]

Author: A. Rossato

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1916

Synopsis: The young boy protagonist Girandolino steals a plane and leaves home in search of adventure. After visiting a number of magical lands, he ends up in the Land of Grief and Hope, an occupied country that has been destroyed by the war. This final leg on his plane journey is pivotal in raising his awareness about the importance of the current war and the suffering of the occupied countries

Keywords: novel, war, adventure war literature, miniature soldiers



Title: **Viperetta** [Little viper]

Author: A. Rubino

Editor: Milano: Vitagliano, 1919

Synopsis: The young girl protagonists grows out of her rebellious nature and excitable temper through a journey of initiation through space, during which she meets a series of improbable mentors.

Keyword: novel, bildungsroman, comical and satirical literature

Title: **Tic E Tac, Ovverossia L'Orologio Di Pamplona** [Tic and Tac And The Clock Of Pamplona]

Author: A. Rubino

Editor: Milano: Vitagliano, 1921

Synopsis: The people of Pamplona have found out how to be forever young: they need to continuously make new toys and enjoy life as children do. The toys, however, soon grow tired of being mistreated by the people of Pamplona. Two little men, who were part of the fabulous city clock, come alive and lead the toys' uprising.

Keywords: novel, comical and satirical literature

Title: **Storia Degli Austriaci Senza Rancio E di Ventidue Asinelli Prigionieri** [A Story of Starving Austrians and Twenty-two Prisoner Donkeys]

Author: F. Saponi

Illustrator: Golia [E. Colmo]

Editor: Ostiglia: La Scolastica, 1915

Synopsis: A group of Italian soldiers makes a prank on a squad of Austrian soldiers by hiding away the donkeys which carry their food. After a while, the donkeys are returned and the tension dissolves into laughs.

Keywords: short story, war, adventure war literature

Title: **I Cavoli A Merenda** [Cabbages For Tea]

Title: **Storie Di Cantastorie** [Storytellers' Stories]

Author: Sto [S. Tofano]

Editor: Milano: Vitagliano, 1920

Synopsis: Two collections of original fairy tales, which were first published in the popular children's magazine "Il Corriere Dei Piccoli". All fairy tales are characterized by absurd and satirical tones, and richly illustrated by the author. Through their comic description of the condition of the soldier, some of the fairy tales can be identified as indirect political satire on the war.

Keywords: short story collection, war, subversive literature, comical and satirical literature

Title: **La Ghirlandetta. Storie di Soldati.** [The Little Garland. Soldiers' Stories]

Author: Teresah [T. Ubertis Gray]

Illustrator: A. Terzi

Editor: Firenze, Bemporad, 1915

Synopsis: A collection of short stories about young war heroes. The protagonists are Italian children or children from countries allied with Italy. The stories are focused on their personal sacrifices, some on the home front, some on the battlefield, and on soldiers' gratitude for the children's effort.

Keywords: short story collection, war, verist war literature, adventure war literature, children on the home front, miniature soldiers

Title: **Piccoli Eroi Della Grande Guerra** [Little Heroes Of The Great War]

Author: Teresah [T. Ubertis Gray]

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1916

Synopsis: A collection of short stories each focused on a fictional child war hero. Some stories are set on the home front, other on the battlefield. The martial rhetoric is emphasized by frequent appeals to mothers regarding the education of their children as patriots.

Keywords: short story collection, war, verist war literature, adventure war literature, children on the home front, miniature soldiers

Title: **La Regina Degli Usignoli. Storia Di Una Bambina Belga** [The Queen of Nightingales. Story Of A Belgian Girl]

Author: Teresah [T. Ubertis Gray]

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1916

Synopsis: Young queen Rosignoletta takes refuge in her neighbour Dwarf Arthur's castle after the invasion of her country. From the castle, she desperately observes the progression of the war and the occupation of her country, while the fairies try to console her. Eventually, Rosignoletta sets off from the castle on a successful mission to find Sister Peace and plea for the end of the conflict.

Keywords: novel, war, subversive literature, twilight literature, pacifism

Title: **Il Romanzo Di Pasqualino** [Pasqualino's Novel]

Author: Teresah [T. Ubertis Gray]

Illustrator: Golia [E. Colmo]

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1917

Synopsis: Pasqualino and his family are supporting the war on the home front as best as they can. Pasqualino's private tutor, Orsetta, feeds his patriotism with edifying stories about Italian soldiers and war toys, such as soldiers and weapon models. At night, in his dreams, Pasqualino travels to the battlefield and hears firsthand accounts of the war from soldiers and war heroes,

Keywords: novel, war, ludic war literature, verist war literature, war as children's game, children on the home front

Title: **L'Omettino Senza Un Quattrino E Altri Racconti** [The Penniless Little Man and Other stories]

Author: Teresah [T. Ubertis Gray]

Editor: Milano: Mondadori, 1919

Synopsis: The travels of a little old man who interprets all metaphors and world play literally, creating very comical situations. His adventures end with his arrival in a fairy-tale like Land of Sweets.

Keywords: novel, twilight literature, comical and satirical literature

Title: **I Bimbi D'Italia Si Chiaman Balilla. I Ragazzi Italiani Nel Risorgimento Nazionale** [Italian Children Are Called Balilla. Italian Youth During The National Risorgimento]

Author: Vamba [L. Bertelli]

Editor: Firenze: Bemporad, 1915

Synopsis: A collection of short stories about children who had distinguished themselves as young heroes during the Risorgimento war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the nineteenth century. The author presents these young heroes as role models for the new generations, who should embrace the war cause and show the same fervent which animated their ancestors.

Keywords: short story collection, war, adventure war literature, miniature soldiers

Title: **Primavere Italiane** [Italian Springs]

Author: O. Visentini

Editor: Ostiglia: La Scolastica, 1915

Synopsis: The war is portrayed through the eyes of two children, Aurora and Lorenzo, who are brother and sister. At home, they experience poverty and misery. Eventually, Lorenzo enlists and sacrifices his life on the battlefield. His grandmother, that had already lost a son in the Risorgimento wars, declares his sacrifice to be “a new spring”, comparing it to the “old spring” represented by her son’s death.

Keywords: novel, war, adventure war literature, verist war literature, children on the home front, miniature soldiers

Title: **La Zingarella E La Principessa** [The Little Gipsy And The Princess]

Author: O. Visentini

Illustrator: E. Pinochi

Editor: Roma: Mondadori, 1920

Synopsis: The war is narrated through the unusual friendship between a poor teenager girl and a young child belonging to a rich family who got lost during an Austrian raid. The two girls run away together in search of a safe place to live. On their way, they witness the misery and tragedies that the civil population is facing as consequence of the war

Keywords: novel, war, verist war literature, women on the home front, children on the home front

Title: **Ciuffettino Alla Guerra** [Ciuffettino Goes to War]

Author: Yambo [E. Novelli]

Editor: Firenze: La Nazione, 1916

Synopsis: The character of Ciuffettino had already appeared in a popular book in 1902. In this new installment of his adventures, Ciuffettino manages to defy and imprison the Austrian emperor and to stop his plans for the construction of new terrible weapons. Later in the novel, he helps the Italian army on the front by revealing them important information about the Austrian weapons.

Keywords: novel, war, adventure war literature, miniature soldiers

Title: **Gorizia Fiammeggiante. Il Figlio Del Tricolore** [Gorizia On Fire. The Tricolore's Son.]

Author: Yambo [E. Novelli]

Editor: Ostiglia: La Scolastica, 1917

Synopsis: Tonino, a boy living in Friuli, a region occupied by the Austrian army, manages to run away from home. He joins the Italian army, fights in the first lines, and finally he marches with the winning Italian army in the liberated city of Gorizia.

Keywords: novel, war, adventure war literature, miniature soldiers